

# interzone



JANUARY 2000 (MM)

NO 151

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**Michael  
Moorecock  
special  
issue**



plus GARY WESTERHILL • DAVID GARNETT • NICK LOWE



# INTERFACE

We stand on the threshold of the year 2000 with a special issue dedicated to Michael Moorcock (born 18th December 1939) and marking the occasion of his 60th birthday. It's hard to imagine that Mike Moorcock, so long an *enfant terrible* of British sf and fantasy, has reached such an age – but then it's hard to imagine (for us long-term sf readers especially) that we're all on the brink of the 21st century.

As both a writer and an editor, Mike's influence has been vast. Beginning as a teenage prodigy in the 1950s, he has been intimately involved in British magazine and book-publishing for over 40 years. These days, married to an American wife, Linda Steel, he resides in Texas – but still makes frequent visits to the UK and other parts. We publish some of his reminiscences of magazine-publishing in this issue (see the piece we have entitled "The 'Fictionmags' Rants").

There is no space for a complete bibliography of Mike's works in this issue (it would be a mammoth undertaking and no doubt would fill half the magazine), but his more significant novels over the years have included *Stormbringer* (1965), *The Wrecks of Time* (1967), *The Final Programme* (1968), *Behold the Man* (1969), *A Cure for Cancer* (1971), *The Warlord of the Air* (1971), *An Alien Heat* (1972), *The English Assassin* (1972), *The Condition of Muzak* (1977), *Gloriana; or, The Unfulfill'd Queen* (1978), *Byzantium Endures* (1981), *The War Hound and the World's Pain* (1981), *The Laughter of Carthage* (1984), *Mother London* (1988), *Jerusalem Commands* (1992), *Blood: A Southern Fantasy* (1995) and *The War Amongst the Angels* (1996). That list represents only a fraction of his total output, which is positively Dickensian in its size, energy and inventiveness (and, not least, in its celebration of his home city of London).

But it is as a magazine editor that Mike has had his greatest influence on *Interzone*, and on a host of other British magazines of recent decades. He became editor of *New Worlds SF* in May 1964, and remained in charge of it (in its incarnation as a regular bimonthly, then monthly) for the next six years. He has overseen various revivals of the title since – most notably, the paperback *New Worlds Quarterlies* of the 1970s and the David Garnett-edited *New Worlds* anthologies of the 1990s. But the mid-to-late 1960s were the heady days of Mike's *New Worlds*: the undersigned began reading it when he was little more

than a child, in November 1965, and was marked for life.

I well remember the excitement of receiving each monthly issue, especially in the years 1966-1969 – the discovery of new authors, new attitudes, new outlooks on the world, and above all the sense of *potential* which the magazine conveyed, the sense that anything was possible in the coming months and years and that here was a literature that *mattered*, a fiction which reflected in imaginative form the fast-changing world around us. Mike Moorcock (and his alter egos, the opinionated "James Colvin" and "Bill Bar-

clay") presided over that magazine in an energetic, amusing, sometimes outrageous but always inspiring fashion. It remains one of the great editorial performances of the century, for which I, and a host of others, remain grateful.

Although it has never been intended as a direct imitation, I think it is safe to say that without Moorcock's *New Worlds* the magazine you hold in your hands would not exist. It is unlikely that any of us would have been moved to start a new magazine in the 1980s without that great prior example of what was possible. Thank you, Mike!

David Pringle

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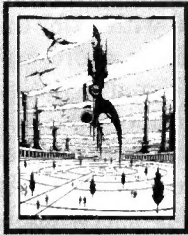
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Above: Cartoon of Mike Moorcock by Mark Reeve for a recent issue of *Time Centre Times*. Queries about the MM Appreciation Society should be addressed to D. J. Rowe at Dhachaid, Lochawe Village, Lochawe-by-Dalmally, Argyll PA33 1AQ, UK, or PO Box 5201, Pinehurst, NC 28374, USA.

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# interzone

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JANUARY 2000

Number 151

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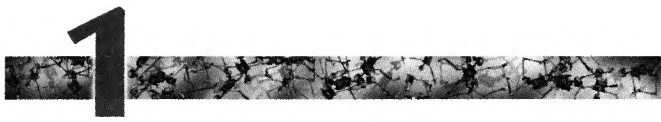
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My name is Ulric, Graf von Bek, and I am the very last of my earthly line. An unhealthy child, cursed with the family disease of albinism, I was born and raised in Bek, Saxony, in the early years of the century. I was trained to rule our province wisely and justly, to preserve the status quo, in the best traditions of the Lutheran Church. My brothers were all far older than I, and engaged mostly in military diplomacy abroad, so the estate, it was thought, would be my responsibility. It was not expected that I would wish to expose, any longer than necessary, my strange, ruby eyes to the light of common day. I accepted this sentence of virtual imprisonment as my due. It had been suffered by many ancestors before me.

Any unease I had in this role was soon subdued as, in my questioning years, I became an obsessive fencer. All my bafflement and frustrations were translated into learning that subtle and dangerous art. Not the sort of silly swashbuckling boy-braggadocio nonsense affected by the *nouveaux riches* and ennobled burgomeisters who perform half-invented rituals of ludicrous manliness at Heidelberg. No real lover of the sword would subject the instrument to such vulgar, clattering nonsense. With precious few affectations, I hope, I became a true swordsman, an expert in the art of the duel to the death.

Old Bek grew all around me. A manor house to which rooms and buildings had been added over the centuries, she emerged like a tree from the lush grounds and thickly wooded hills of Bek, surrounded by the cedars, poplars and cypresses my crusader forebears had brought from the Holy Land, by the Saxon oaks into which my earlier ancestors had bound their souls, so that they and the world were rooted in the same earth. Those ancestors had first fought against Charlemagne and then fought with him. They had sent two sons to Roncesvalles. They had served King Ethelred of England.

My tutor was old von Asch, black, shrunken and gnarled, whom my brothers called The Walnut, whose family had been smiths and swordsmen since the time their first ancestor struck the first bronze weapon. He loved me. I was a vessel for his experience. I was willing to learn anything, try any trick to improve my skills. Whatever he demanded, I would eventually rise to meet that expectation. I was, he said, the living record of his family wisdom.

But von Asch's wisdom was nothing very sensational. Indeed, his advice was subtle and appealed, as perhaps he knew, to my aestheticism, my love of the complex and the symbolic. Rather than impose his ideas on me, he planted them like seeds. They would grow if the conditions were right. This was also the secret of his teaching. He somehow made you realize that you were doing it yourself, that the situation demanded certain responses and what he helped you to do was trust your intuition and use it.

Of course, there was his notion of the sword's song.

"You have to listen for the song." He said. "Every great individual sword has her own song. Once you find that song and hear it clearly, then you can fight with it, for the song is the very essence of the sword and the sword was not forged to decorate walls or be a lifted signal of victory and dominance, but to cut flesh, bone and sinew, and kill. She is not an extension of your manhood, nor an expression of your selfhood. She is an instrument of death. At her best, she kills in justice. If this notion is objectionable to you, my son – and I do not suggest for an instant that you apply it, simply that you acknowledge this truth – then you should put away the sword forever. Fighting with swords is a refined art, but it is an art best enjoyed when also a matter of life and death."

To fight for the ultimate – against oblivion – seemed to me exactly the noble destiny the Raven Sword, our ancestral blade, deserved. Few down the centuries had shown much interest in this queerly-wrought old longsword. It was even considered something of an embarrassment. We had a few stories of mad ancestors who had perhaps not been exemplary in their tormented curiosity and had put the sword to strange uses. We tended to want to forget the sword and its legends. But there were few in the empty, abandoned and lost rooms at Bek, which had no family to fill them any longer, who could remember. A few retainers too old for war or the city. And, of course, books.

When it was time for me to handle that sword whenever I wished, von Asch taught me her main songs – for this blade was a special blade. There were extraordinarily resonances to the steel, however you turned it. A vibrancy which seemed feral. Like a perfect musical instrument. She moved to those songs. She seemed to guide me. He showed me how to coax from her, by subtle strokes and movements of my fingers and wrists, her songs of hatred and contempt, sweet songs of yearning bloodlust, melancholy memories of battles fought, determined revenge. But no love songs. Swords, said von Asch, rarely had hearts. And it is unwise to rely on their loyalty.

This particular weapon, which we called *Ravenbrand*, was a big broadsword of black iron with a slender, unusually leaf-shaped blade. Our family legend said that it was forged by Friar Corvo, the Venetian armourer, who wrote the famous treatise on the subject. But there is a tale that Corvo – the Raven Smith as Browning called him – only found the sword, or at least the blade itself, and wrought nothing but the hilt.

By then it was August 1914 and for the first months of that war I longed to be old enough to join it. Then as the realities were reported by the returning veterans – young men hardly older than myself – I began to wonder how such a war could ever be ended.

My brothers died of disease or were blown apart in some nameless pit. Soon I had no other living relation but my ancient grandfather, who lived in sheltered luxury on the outskirts of Mirenborg, in Waldenstein, and would look at me from huge, pale, disappointed grey eyes which saw the end of everything he had worked for. After a while he would wave me away. Eventually he refused



# RAVENBRAND

*Michael Moorcock*



Illustrations by Dominic Harman

to have me at his bedside.

I was inducted in 1918. The war lasted just long enough to demonstrate what cruel folly it was. We could rarely speak of what we'd witnessed.

Sometimes it seemed a million voices called out to us from no-man's-land, pleading only for a release from pain. *Help me, help me, help me.* They did not leave me when I slept. They turned and twisted in their millions, screaming and wailing for release, throughout my constant dreams. At night, I left one horror to inhabit another. Yet there seemed little difference between them.

What was worse, my dreams did not confine themselves to the current conflict, but to every war Man had instigated. Vividly, and no doubt thanks to my intense reading, I began to witness huge battles, and some of them I recognized from history. Most, however, were merely the repetition, with different costumes, of the obscenity I witnessed 24 hours a day from the trenches. Then, gradually, the nightmares faded. Real life proved hard enough, perhaps.

We, who were technically the instigators of the war and subject to the victor's view of history, were humiliated by the Treaty of Versailles and the common people were forced to pay far too high a price for the follies of exiled nobles. We live, die, know sickness and health, comfort and discomfort, because of the egos of a few stupid men.

To be fair, some of those nobles, such as myself, elected to stay and work for the restoration of the German Federation, though I had no liking for the swaggering aggression of the defeated Prussians, who had thought themselves unbeatable.

Our family and its fortunes had been greatly reduced by the War. I was frequently advised to sell Bek. Bustling black-marketeers and rising fascists would offer to buy my ancestral seat from me. They thought they could buy the authority of place in the same way that they had bought their grand houses and large motorcars.

In some ways, having to manage my estates rather more desperately than in the past, I learned a little of the uncertainty and horror facing the average German, who saw his country on the brink of total ruin.

It was easy to blame the victors. It was true their tax on us was punitive, unjust, inhumane and foolish, that it was the poison which the Nazis, over in Munich and in Bavaria in general, began to use to their own advantage. Even as their popular support began to slide, the Nazi Party was able to take control of almost all the power in Germany. On the radio, in the newspapers and magazines and movies, they began to tell the people whom they should love and whom they should hate.

For all my determination to pursue the cause of peace, I still maintained my swordsmanship. It had become much more than a mere *pasa tiempo*. It remained something of a cause. I suppose, a method of controlling what little there was still in my own control. The skills needed to wield the Raven blade were highly specialized, for while my sword was balanced so perfectly I could easily spin it in one hand, it was of heavy, flexible steel and had a life of its own, almost like a supple cat. Sometimes it

seemed to flow through my hands, even as I practised. The other peculiarity about the blade was that it was impossible to sharpen with ordinary stone. Von Asch, gone off at the beginning of the War and presumed killed, had given me a special grindstone, which appeared to be imbedded with pieces of diamond. Not that the blade ever needed much sharpening.

I carried the sword with me whenever I travelled, which was rarely. A local maker had fashioned a long case, rather like a gun case, into which *Ravenbrand* fitted discretely, so that to the casual eye, with the case over my shoulder, I looked like some bucolic landsman prepared for a day's shooting or even fishing. I had it in my mind that whatever happened to Bek, the sword and I would survive.

Meanwhile the quality of our civil life continued to decline in Germany. Even the town of Bek, dreaming gables, twisted old roofs and chimneys, green-glazed windows, her weekly markets and ancient customs, was not immune to the 20th-century jackboot.

Before 1933, a small division of self-titled Freikorps, made up mostly of unemployed ex-soldiers commanded by NCOs who had given themselves the rank of Captain or higher, paraded occasionally through the streets, though they were not based in Bek, where I refused to allow any such goings-on, but in a neighbouring city. They had too many rivals in the city to contend with, I suspect, and felt more important showing their strength to a town of old people and children, which had lost most of its men.

By 1933, in spite of so many of us knowing what the Nazis were like, they had taken control of parliament. Our constitution was no more than a piece of paper, burning amongst great, inspired books, by Mann, Heine, Brecht, Zweig and Remarque, which the Nazis heaped in blazing pyres at crossroads and in town squares. An act they termed "cultural cleansing." It was the triumph of ignorance and bigotry.

Boots, blackjacks and whips became the instruments of political policy. We could not resist because we could not believe what had happened. We had relied upon our democratic institutions. We were in a state of national denial. The realities, however, were soon demonstrated to us.

As the Nazi grip tightened, fewer and fewer of us spoke out, or even grumbled. The stormtroopers were everywhere. They would arrest people on an arbitrary basis "just to give them a taste of what they'll get if they step out of line" and several journalists I knew, who had no political affiliations, were locked up for months, released, then locked up again. Not only would they not speak when they were released, they were terrified of speech.

This, I gather, was Nazi policy, to cow the protesting classes. They succeeded fairly well, with the compliance of the church and the army, but they did not entirely extinguish opposition. I, for instance, determined to join the White Rose Society, sworn to destroy Hitler and work against his interests in every way.

I had advertised my sympathies as best I could and was eventually contacted by telephone. A young woman



gave her name as "Gertie" and told me that she would be in touch as soon as it was safe. I believed that they were probably checking my credentials, making sure I was not a spy or a potential traitor.

Twice in the streets of Bek I was pointed out as an unclean creature, some kind of leper. I was lucky to get home without being harmed. After that, I went out as little as possible, usually after dark. Frequently accompanied by my sword. Stupid as it sounds, for the stormtroopers were armed with guns, the sword gave me a sense of purpose, a kind of courage, a peculiar security.

Not long after the second incident, when I had been spat at by brownshirt boys, who had also attacked my old manservant Reiter as an aristocrat's lackey, those bizarre, terrifying dreams began again. With even greater intensity. Wagnerian, almost. Thick with armour and heavy warhorses, butchering steel and blaring trumpets. All the potent, misplaced romance of conflict. The kind of imagery which powered the very movement I was sworn to fight.

Slowly the dreams took on some kind of shape and in them I was again plagued by voices in languages I could not understand, full of unlikely, tongue-twisting names, almost a litany. It seemed to me I was listening to a long list of those who had already died violent deaths since the beginning of time – and those who were yet to die.

## 2

I was still waiting for another call from "Gertie" when, in the early months of 1934, I had an unexpected and rather alarming visitor to Bek.

My people are related through marriage and other kinships to the traditional rulers of Mirenburg, the capital of Waldenstein, which the Nazis, and later the Soviets, would annex. Although predominantly of Slavic stock, the principality has for hundreds of years, been culturally linked to Germany, through language and common concerns. The rulers of Mirenburg had not survived the tenor of the century. They, too, had known civil war, most of it instigated by foreign interests who had always sought to control Waldenstein. The Badehoff-Krasny family had been restored to power, but more as clients of Austria than as independent rulers. They had married into the von Mincts. The current Prince of Waldenstein was my cousin Gaynor, whose mother had been one of the most beautiful women in Buda-Pest and was still reckoned a powerful political mind.

Prince Gaynor Paul St Odhran Badehoff-Krasny von Minct lacked his mother's calm intelligence, but had all her wonderful Hungarian beauty and a charm which often disarmed his political opponents. At one time he had shared his mother's politics, but it seemed he had followed the road of many frustrated idealists in those days and saw fascism as the strong force that would revitalize an exhausted Europe.

It was a shock, however, to see him arrive in an official black Mercedes, festooned with swastikas, wearing the uniform of a captain in the "elite" SS. My manservant

Reiter disdainfully opened the door for them and took my cousin's card. He announced, in high sarcasm, the honour of the arrival of Captain Paul von Minct.

Before they were taken below stairs by a determined Reiter, Gaynor was addressed as Captain von Minct both by his driver and by the skull-faced Prussian, Sergeant Klosterheim, whose eyes glittered from somewhere within the deep caverns of their sockets.

Gaynor looked splendid and sinister in the black and silver uniform, with its red and black swastika insignia. He was, as usual, completely engaging and amusing, making some self-deprecating murmur about his uniform even as he followed the servants up the stairs. I invited him, as soon as he was in his rooms and refreshed, to join me on the terrace before dinner. His driver and the secretary, Klosterheim, would take their supper in the servants' hall. Klosterheim had seemed to resent this a little, but then accepted it with the air of a man who had been insulted too many times for this to matter. I was glad he wasn't eating with us. His sickly, grey skin and almost fleshless head gave him the appearance of a dead man.

It was a relatively warm evening and the moon was already rising as the sun set, turning the surrounding landscape to glittering white and bloody shadow. This would probably be our last snow. I almost regretted its passing.

Gaynor came down in perfect evening dress and accepted a cigarette from my case. We agreed that the sun setting over the old oaks and cypresses, the soft, snowy roofs and leaning chimneys of Bek did the soul good. We said little while, as true romantics, we savoured a view Goethe would have turned into a cause.

When it was twilight, and growing a little chilly, we continued to sit outside, under the moon, exchanging superficial questions and answers about obscure relatives and common acquaintances. He mentioned a name. I said that to my astonishment he had joined the Nazi Party. Why would someone of that sort do such a thing? And I let the question hang.

He laughed.

"Oh, no, cousin. Never fear! I didn't volunteer. I'm only a nominal Nazi, an honorary captain in the SS. It makes them feel respectable. And it's a useful uniform for travelling in Germany these days. After a visit I made a few weeks ago to Berlin, they offered me the rank. I accepted it. They assured me that I would not be called up in time of war! I had a visit, a letter. You know how they cultivate people like ourselves. It helps convince old fogies like you that the Nazis are no longer a bunch of uneducated, unemployed, unthinking butchers."

I told him that I remained a sceptic. All I saw were the same thugs with the spending power of a looted state, willing to pay anything to cultivate those people whose association with their Party would give it authority in the wider world.

"Precisely," he said, "but we can use these thugs for our own ends, can't we? To improve the world? They know in their bones that they have no real moral position or political programmes. They know how to seize and hold power, but not much else. They need people like us, cousin. And the more people like us join them, the more

they will become like us.”

I told him that in my experience most people seemed to become like them. He said that it was because there were not yet enough of “us” running things.

I suggested that this was dangerous logic. I had heard of no individuals corrupting power, but I had seen many individuals corrupted by it.

He found this amusing. He said that it depended what you meant by power. And how you used that power when it was yours.

To attack and slander tax-paying citizens because of their race and religion, I said. Power to do that?

Of course not, he said. The Jewish Question was a nonsense. We all knew that. The poor old Jews were always the scapegoats. They’d survive this bit of political theatre. Nobody ever came to serious harm doing a few physical jerks in a well-ordered open air environment. Hadn’t I seen the film of those camps? They had every luxury.

He had the grace to change the conversation as we went in to dinner.

After dinner it was too cold for the terrace, so we smoked our cigars by the fire in the old study and enjoyed our brandy and soda and the familiarity of old-fashioned, civilized comforts. I realized that my cousin had not come for a vacation, that some sort of business brought him to Bek, and I wondered when he would raise the issue.

He had spent the past week in Berlin and was full of gossip about Hitler’s new hierarchy. Goering was a great snob and always liked to cultivate the aristocracy. So Prince Gaynor – whom the Germans preferred to call by the name of Paul von Minct – was the personal guest of the Reichsmarshal which, he said, was a great deal better than being Hitler’s personal guest. Hitler, he assured me, was the most boring little man on the face of the planet. All he liked to do was drone on and on about his half-baked ideas while a flunky played the same Franz Lehar records over and over again. An evening with Hitler, he said, was like the longest evening you could imagine with your prissy old aunt. Goebbels was too withdrawn to be good company and confined himself to sly remarks about the other Nazis, but Goering was great fun and had a genuine love of art which his colleagues only pretended. He was making it his business to rescue threatened paintings from the Nazi censor. In fact his house in Berlin had become a haven, a repository for all kinds of art, including ancient German folk objects and weaponry.

Although that ironic, slightly mocking tone never left him, I was not convinced that Gaynor was merely playing along with the Nazis in order to keep Waldenstein free from their direct influence. He said he accepted the *realpolitik* of the situation, but hoped that it would suit the new German masters to let his little country remain at least superficially independent. Yet I sensed more than this. I sensed his attraction to the whole perverse slew of corrupted romanticism. He joked that he had as much Jewish and Slavic blood as he had Aryan, but it seemed the Nazis turned a blind eye to some of one’s ancestors if one was useful enough to them.

And it was clear that “Captain von Minct” was currently useful enough to the Nazis for them to equip him with a staff car, a driver and a secretary. And from his manner, it was obvious he was here on some connected business. I could only believe my eyes and use my intelligence. Had Gaynor been sent here to recruit me, too?

Abruptly, he proposed that his secretary, Lieutenant Klosterheim, join us. “He’s a little touchy about being treated as an outsider and he’s rather well-connected, I understand, to Goebbels’s wife’s people. An old mountain family. One of those which refused all honours and maintain their landsman status as a matter of pride. The family had some kind of fortress in the Hartz Mountains for a thousand years.”

I no longer much cared. Gaynor’s company had begun to irritate me and it was growing harder for me to remember that he was my guest. Klosterheim might relieve the atmosphere.

This fantasy was dispelled the moment the cadaverous, monkish figure in his tight SS uniform arrived, his cap under his arm. I apologized for my rudeness and invited him to drink. He waved a pocket *Mein Kampf* at me and said he had had plenty to engage him in his room. He had the air of a fanatic and reminded me in many ways of his neurotic Führer. Gaynor seemed almost deferential to him.

Klosterheim agreed to take a small glass of Benedictine. As I handed him his drink he spoke to Gaynor over my shoulder. “Have you made the proposition yet, Captain von Minct?”

Gaynor laughed. A little strained. I turned to ask him a question and he raised his hand. “A small matter, cousin, which can be discussed at any time. Lieutenant Klosterheim is very direct and efficient, but he sometimes lacks the subtler graces.”

“We are not very gentlemanly at Klosterheim,” said the lieutenant severely. “We have no time to cultivate fine manners, for life is hard and constantly threatened. We’ve defended your borders since time began. All we have are our ancient traditions. Our craggy fortresses. Our pride and our privacy.”

I suggested that modern tourism might consequently be welcomed by his family. And bring them some relief. Some ease, at last. A busload of Bavarians round the old pile and one could put one’s feet up for a week. I’d do the same, only all I had was a glorified farmhouse. I don’t know what encouraged such levity in me. Perhaps it was a response to his unrelenting sobriety. Something unpleasant glinted from within his eye sockets and then dulled again.

“Perhaps so,” he said. “Yes. It would give us the easy life, eh?” He consumed his Benedictine and made an awkward attempt at grace. “But Captain von Minct came here, I believe, to ease one of your burdens, Herr Count?”

“I have none that need easing,” I said.

“Of responsibility. Of stewardship.” Gaynor was now cultivating a rather over-hearty manner. Klosterheim had no trouble sounding threatening but Gaynor wanted my approval as well as whatever it was he had come for.

“You know I place little value on our remaining heirlooms,” I said, “except where they pertain to personal,



family matters. Is there something you want?"

"You remember the old sword you used to play with before you went to the War? Black with age? Must have rusted through eventually. Rather like von Asch himself, your tutor. What did you do with that old sword in the end? Give it away? Sell it? Or did you place a more sentimental value on it?"

"Presumably, cousin, you speak of the sword *Ravenbrand*."

"Just so, cousin. *Ravenbrand*. I had forgotten you gave it a nickname."

"It has never had a different name. It is as old as our family. It has all sorts of legendary nonsense attached to it, of course, but no evidence. Just the usual stories we invent to make generations of farmers seem more interesting. Ghosts and old treasure. No antiquarian or genuine historian would give credence to those legends. They are as familiar as they are unlikely." I became a little alarmed. Surely he had not come here to loot us of our oldest treasures, our responsibilities, our heritage? "But it has little commercial value, I understand."

"It is more valuable as a pair. When matched to its twin," said Klosterheim, almost humorously. His mouth twisted in a peculiar rictus. Perhaps a smile. "Its counterweight."

I had begun to suspect that Klosterheim was not, as they say in Vienna, the full pfennig. His remarks seemed to bear only the barest connection to the conversation, as if his mind was operating on some other, colder plane altogether. It was easier to ignore him than ask him for explanations. How on earth could a sword be a "counterweight"? He was probably one of those mystical Nazis.

"Don't minimize your family's achievements, either." Gaynor recalled our ancient victories. "You've given Germany some famous soldiers."

"And rogues. And radicals."

"And some who were all three," said Gaynor, still hearty as a highwayman on the scaffold. All face.

"Your namesake, for instance," murmured Klosterheim. Even the act of speaking seemed to add a chill to the night air.

"Eh?"

Klosterheim's voice seemed to echo in his mouth. "He who sought and found – the Grail. Who gave your family its antique motto."

There was a good fire going in the hearth and I had an unlikely frisson of nostalgia as I remembered the great family Christmases we had enjoyed, as only Saxons can enjoy their Yuletide festival, when my father and mother and brothers were all alive and friends came from Scotland and France and America, together with more distant relatives, to enjoy that unquestioned fantasy of comfort and good will. War had destroyed all that. And now I stood by that fire-blackened oak and slate watching the smoke rise from out of a guttering, unhappy fire and did my best to remember my manners as I entertained the two gentlemen in black and silver who had come, I was now certain, to take away my sword.

"*Do you the devil's work.*" Klosterheim read the coat of

arms which was imbedded above the hearth. I thought the thing was vulgar and would have removed it, if it had not entailed ripping down the entire wall. A piece of Gothic nonsense, with its almost alchemical motifs and its dark admonishment which, according to my reading, had once meant something rather different than it seemed. "Do you still follow that motto, Herr Count?"

"There's more stories attached to that than there are to the sword. Unfortunately, as you know, our family curse of albinism was not always tolerated and some generations came to see it as a matter of shame, destroying much that had been recorded where it pertained to albinos like myself or, I suspect, anything which seemed a little strange to the kind of mentality which believes burning books to be burning unpalatable truths. Something we seem prone to, in Germany. So little record remains of any sense. But I understand the motto to be ironic in some way."

"Perhaps." Klosterheim looked capable of carrying only the heaviest of ironies. "But you still have the goblet, I understand."

"My dear Herr Lieutenant, there isn't an old family in Germany that doesn't have at least one Grail legend attached to it, and usually some cup or other which is supposed to represent the Grail. They're all 19th-century inventions. Part of the Gothic revival. The Romantic movement. A nation reinventing herself. You must know of half-a-dozen such family legends. Few can be traced much past 1750. I can imagine, too, that with your recruitment of Wagner to the Nazi cause your Leader has need of such symbols, but if we did have an old goblet, it has long since gone from here."

"I agree these associations are ridiculous." Gaynor took himself closer to the fire. "But don't you have some old goblet you could dig out for us? I was sure my father remembers your grandfather showing him a golden bowl that had the properties of glass and metals combined. Warm to the touch, he said, and vibrant."

"If there is such a family secret, cousin, then it has not been passed on to me."

Klosterheim frowned, clearly unsure if he should believe me. Gaynor was openly incredulous. "You of all the von Beks would know of such things. You've read everything in the Library. Von Asch passed what he knew on to you. Why, you yourself, cousin, are almost part of the museum. No doubt a better prospect than the circus."

"Very true," I said. I glanced at the hideous old clock over the mantle and asked him if he would excuse me. It was time I turned in.

Gaynor began to try to charm his way out of what he now understood to be an insult, but his remark about me was no more offensive than most of his and Klosterheim's conversation. There was a certain coarseness about him I hadn't noticed in the past. No doubt he had the scent of his new pack on him. It was how he intended to survive.

"But we still have business," said Klosterheim.

Gaynor turned towards the fire.

"Business? You're here on business?" I pretended to be surprised.

Gaynor said quietly, not turning to look at me. "Berlin

made a decision. About these special German relics."

"Berlin? Do you mean Hitler and Co?"

"They are fascinated by such things, cousin."

"They are symbols of our old German power," said Klosterheim brusquely. They represent what so many German aristocrats have lost – the vital blood of a brave and warlike people."

"And why would you want to take them from me?"

"For safe-keeping, cousin." Gaynor stepped forward before Klosterheim could reply. "So that they are not stolen by Bolsheviks, for instance. Or otherwise harmed. They are state treasures, as I'm sure you will agree. Your name will be credited of course, in any exhibition. And there would be some financial recompense, I'm sure."

"I told you, I know nothing of the so-called Grail. But what would happen if I refused to give up the sword?"

"It would make you, of course, an enemy of the state." Gaynor had the decency to glance down at his well-polished boots. "And therefore an enemy of the Nazi Party and all it stands for."

"An enemy of the Nazi Party?" I spoke thoughtfully. "Only a fool would antagonize Hitler and expect to survive, eh?"

"Very true, cousin."

"Well," I said, as I left the room, "the Beks have rarely been fools. I'd better sleep on the problem."

"I'm sure your dreams will be inspired," said Gaynor rather cryptically.

But Klosterheim was more direct. "We have put sentimentality behind us in modern Germany and are making our own traditions, Herr Count. That sword is no more yours than it is mine. The sword is Germany's, a symbol of our ancient power and valour. Of our blood. You cannot betray your blood."

I looked at the inbred mountaineer and the Slavic Aryan before me. I looked at my own bone-white hand, the pale nails and faintly darker veins. "Our blood? My blood. Who invented the myth of blood?"

"Myths are simply old truths disguised as stories," said Klosterheim. "That is the secret of Wagner's success."

"It can't be his music. Swords, bows and tormented souls. Did you say the sword was one of a pair? Does the owner of the sister sword seek to own the set?"

Gaynor spoke from behind Klosterheim.

"The other sword, cousin, the last we heard of it, was in Jerusalem."

I suppose I could not help smiling as I made my way to bed, yet that sense of foreboding soon returned and by the time I put my head on my pillow I was already wondering how I could save my sword and myself from Hitler. Then, in a strange hypnagogic moment between waking and sleeping, I heard a voice say: "Naturally I accept paradox. Paradox is the stuff of the multiverse. The essence of humanity. We are sustained by paradox." It sounded like my own voice. Yet it carried an authority, a confidence and a power I had never known.

I thought at first someone was in the room, but then I had fallen back into slumber and found my nostrils suddenly filled with a remarkable stink. It was pungent,

almost tangible, but not unpleasant. Acrid, dry. The smell of snakes, perhaps? Or lizards? Gigantic lizards. Creatures which flew as a squadron, under the control of mortals, and rained fiery venom down upon their enemies. An enemy that was not bound by any rules save to win at all costs, by whatever it chose to do and be.

It was a dream of flying, but unlike any I had heard of. I was seated in a great black saddle which appeared to have been carved from a single piece of ebony, yet which fitted my body perfectly. I leaned forward to place my hand on a scaly skin that was hot to the touch, suggesting an alien metabolism, and something reared up in front of me, all rustle and clatter and the jingling of harness, casting a vast shadow. The monstrous head of what I first took to be a dinosaur and then realized was a dragon, absolutely dwarfing me, its mouth carrying a bit of intricately decorated gold whose tasselled decorations were as long as my body and which threatened to sweep against me when the head turned and a vast, glowing yellow eye regarded me with an intelligence that was inconceivably ancient, drawing on experience of worlds which had never known mankind. And yet, was I foolish to read affection there?

That vibrant stink filled my lungs. There was a hint of smoke wreathing the beast's huge nostrils and something like acid boiled between its long teeth. This beast's metabolism was extraordinary. Even as I dreamed I recalled stories of spontaneous combustion and would not have been surprised if my steed had suddenly burst into flames beneath the saddle. There was an almost sensual movement of huge bones and muscles and sinews, of scraping scales, a booming rush as the dragon's wings beat against gravity and all the laws of common sense and then, with another thrust which thrilled my whole body, we were airborne. The world fell away. It seemed so natural to fly. Another thrust and we had reached the clouds. It felt strangely familiar, to be riding on the back of a monster, yet guiding her with all the gentle fluid ease of a Viennese riding master. A gentle touch above the ear with the staff, a finger tip movement of the reins.

While my left hand held the traditional dragon goad, the other gripped *Ravenbrand*, pulsing with a horrible darkness and perpetually running with blood, the runes in her blade glowing a brilliant scarlet. And I heard that voice again. My own voice.

*Arioch! Arioch! Blood and souls for my Lord Arioch!*

Such barbaric splendour, such splendid savagery, such ancient, sophisticated knowledge. But all offering a vocabulary of image, word and idea utterly alien to the Enlightenment humanist that was Ulric von Bek. Here were ideals of courage and battle-prowess which whispered in my ear like enticing obscenities, thoroughly at odds with my training and traditions. Cruel, unthinkable ideas taken for granted. Here was a power greater than any modern human being could ever know. The power to transform reality. The power of sorcery in a war fought without machines, yet more terrifying, more all-encompassing than the Great War which had recently passed.

*Arioch! Arioch!*

I could not know who Arioch was, but something in my



bones conjured a strong sense of subtle, alluring evil, an evil so sophisticated it could even believe itself to be virtuous. This was some of the scent I had smelled on Gaynor and Klosterheim, but nothing like the wholesome beast stink of my dragon, her massive, sinuous body beating an almost leisurely course across the sky. Her scales clashed faintly and her spiky crests folded back against her spine. My modern eye marvelled at these natural aerodynamics which enabled such a creature to exist. The heat from her was almost uncomfortable and every so often a droplet of venom would form on her lips and flash to earth, burning stone, trees, even setting water ablaze for a short while. What strange twist of fate had made us allies? Allies we were. Bonded in the same way that ordinary men are bonded to ordinary animals, almost telepathic, a deep empathetic heartbeat that made our blood one, our souls' fates united. When, at the dawn of time, had we come together to form this complementary union?

Now man and beast climbed higher and higher into the chilly upper air, steam wafting from the dragon's head and body, his tail and wings growing faintly sluggish as we reached our maximum altitude and looked down on a world laid out like a map. I felt an indescribable mixture of horror and ecstasy. It was how I imagined the dreams of opium or haschisch eaters. Without end. Without meaning. A burning world. A martial world. A world which could have been my own, my 20th-century world, but which I knew was not. Armies and flags. Armies and flags. And in their wake, the piled corpses of innocents.

Now, as the clouds parted completely, I saw that the sky was filled with dragons. A great squadron of flying reptiles whose wings were at least 30 feet across and whose riders were dwarfed. A squadron that waited lazily, adrift in the atmosphere, for me to lead it.

In sudden terror I woke up. And looked directly into the cold eyes of Lieutenant Klosterheim.

"My apologies, Count von Bek, but we have urgent business in Berlin and must leave within the hour. I thought you might have something to tell us."

Confused by my dream and furious at Klosterheim's graceless intrusion, I told him I would see him downstairs shortly.

In the breakfast room, where one of my old servants was bleakly doing his best to attend to my guest, I found them munching ham and bread and calling for eggs and coffee.

Gaynor waved his cup at me as I came in. "My dear fellow. How kind of you to join us. We received word from Berlin that we must return immediately. I'm so sorry to be a bad guest."

I wondered how he had received such news. A private radio, perhaps, in the car?

"Well," I said, "we shall just have to be content with our dull tranquillity."

I knew what I was doing. I saw a contradiction in Klosterheim's eye. He was almost smiling as he glanced down at the table.

"What about the sword, cousin?" Gaynor impatiently

directed the servant to unshell his eggs. "Have you decided to give it up to the care of the State?"

"I don't believe it has much value to the State," I said, "whereas it has great sentimental value to me."

Gaynor scowled and rose up in his chair. "Dear cousin, I am not speaking for myself, but if Berlin were to hear your words – you would not have a home, let alone a sword to keep it in!"

"Well," I said, "I'm one of those old-fashioned Germans. I believe that duty and honour come before personal comfort. Hitler, after all, is an Austrian and of that happy-go-lucky, tolerant nature which thinks less of such things, I'm sure."

Gaynor was not slow to understand my irony. He seemed to relish it. But Klosterheim was angry again, I could tell.

"Could we perhaps see the sword, cousin?" Gaynor said. "Just to verify that it is the one Berlin seeks. It could be that it's the wrong blade altogether!"

I was in no mood to put myself or the sword in jeopardy. Fantastic as it seemed, I believed both my cousin and his lieutenant to be capable of hitting me over the head and stealing the sword if I showed it to them.

"I'll be delighted to show it to you," I said. "As soon as it comes back from Mirenburg, where I left it with a relative of von Asch's to be cleaned and restored."

"Von Asch disappeared, did he not?" Gaynor interrupted.

"Yes. Just before the War. He wanted to visit a certain Romanian iron mine, where he expected to find metal of special properties for a sword he wished to make, but I suspect he was too old for the journey. We never heard from him again."

"And he told you nothing about the sword?"

"A few legends, cousin. But I scarcely remember them. They didn't seem remarkable."

"And he mentioned nothing of a sister sword?"

"Absolutely nothing. I doubt if ours is the blade you seek."

"I'm beginning to suspect that you're right. I'll do my best to put your point of view to Berlin, but it will be difficult to present it in a sympathetic light."

"They have called on the spirit of Old Germany," I said. "They'd be wise to respect that spirit and not coarsen its meaning to suit their own brutal agendas."

"And perhaps we would be wise to report such treacherous remarks before we are somehow contaminated by them ourselves." Klosterheim's strange, cold eyes flared like ice in sudden firelight.

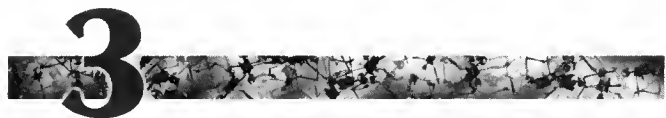
Gaynor tried to make light of this threat. "It is true, cousin, that the Führer will look very positively on someone who bestows such a gift to the nation. Any preconceptions that he, like so many of his class, are traitors to the New Germany, will be dispelled."

He was already speaking the language of deceit and obfuscation. The kind of double-talk which always signals a dearth of moral and intellectual content. He was already, whatever he had said to me, a Nazi.

I went with them to the outside door and stood on the steps as their driver brought the Mercedes round. It was still dark, with a sliver of moon on a pale horizon. I

watched the black and chrome car move slowly away down the drive towards those ancient gates, each topped by a time-worn sculpture. Firedrakes. They reminded me of my dream.

They reminded me that my dream had been considerably less terrifying than my present reality.



That same evening I received a telephone call from the mysterious "Gertie." She suggested that around sunset I go down to the river which marked the northern edge of our land where someone would contact me. I was perfectly happy to stroll down through that lovely rolling parkland to the little bridge which connected, via a wicket gate, with a public path which had once been the main road to the town of Bek. Now one rarely saw anything but an occasional pair of lovers or an old man walking his dog.

Just on that point of dusk between night and day, when a faint shivering mist had begun to rise from the river, I suddenly saw a tall figure appear on the bridge and wait patiently at the gate for me to unlock it. I moved forward quickly, apologetically. Somehow I had not seen the man approach. I opened the gate, welcoming him onto my land. He stepped swiftly through, closely followed by a slighter figure, whom I thought at first must be a bodyguard, since it carried a longbow and a quiver of arrows.

"Are you Gertie's friends?" I asked the pre-arranged question.

"We know her very well," answered the archer. A woman's voice, low and commanding. Her face hooded against the evening chill, she stepped forward out of the tall man's shadow and took my hand. A strong, soft, dry handshake. I invited them up to the house, but the man declined. His head lifted from within a darkness it seemed to carry as a kind of aura. He was gaunt, relatively young, and his blind eyes were glaring emeralds, as if he stared past me into a future so monstrous, so cruel and so agonizing that he sought any distraction from its constant presence.

"I believe your house has already been microphoned," he said. "Even if it has not been, it's always wise to behave as if the Nazis could be listening. We'll stay out here for a while and then, when our business is done, perhaps go into the house for some refreshment?"

"You will be welcome."

His voice was surprisingly light and pleasant, with a faint Austrian accent. He introduced himself as Herr El and his handshake was also reassuring. I knew I was in the presence of a man of substance. His dark green cape and hat were familiar enough clothing in Germany to cause no comment, but they also had the effect of disguising him, for the great collar could be pulled around the face and the brim tugged down to put what remained in shadow.

"You're here to help me join the White Rose Society, I

presume?" I strolled with them through the ornamental shrubberies. "To fight against Hitler."

"We are certainly here to help you fight against Hitler," said the young woman, "but you, Count Ulric, are destined for specific duties in the struggle."

"Perhaps you know that I had a visit from my cousin Gaynor yesterday. He has Germanized his name and calls himself Paul von Minct. He's become a Nazi, though he denies it."

"Like so many, Gaynor sees Hitler and Company as furthering their own power. They cannot realize to what extent Hitler and his people are both fascinated by power and addicted to it. They desire it more than ordinary people. They think of nothing else. They are constantly scheming and counter-scheming, always ahead of the game, because most of us don't even know there's a game being played." He spoke with the urbanity of one of those old Franz Josef Viennese cosmopolitans. For me he represented a reassuring past, a less cynical time.

The young woman's own face remained hidden and she wore smoked glasses, so that I could not even see her eyes. I was surprised she could see at all as the dusk turned to darkness. She chose to sit on an old stone bench, she said, and listen to the last of the birdsong. Meanwhile Herr El and myself slowly walked amongst formal beds and borders which were just beginning to show the shoots of our first flowers. He asked me a lot of ordinary questions, mostly about my background, and I was happy to answer. I knew that the White Rose had to be more than careful.

He asked me what I hoped to achieve by joining. I said that the overthrow of Hitler was the chief reason. He asked me if I thought that would rid us of Nazis and I was forced to admit that I did not.

"So how are we to defeat the Nazis?" asked Herr El, pausing beneath one of our old ornamental statues, so worn that the face was unrecognizable. "With machine guns? With rhetoric? With passive resistance?"

It was as if he was trying to dissuade me from joining, telling me that the society could not possibly have effect.

I answered almost unthinkingly – "By example, sir, surely?"

He seemed pleased with this and nodded slightly. "It is pretty much all most of us have," he agreed. "And we can help people escape. How would you function in that respect, Count Ulric?"

"I could use my house. There are many secret parts. I could hide people. I could probably hide a radio, too. Obviously, we can get people into Poland and also to Hamburg. We're fairly well-positioned as a staging post, I'd say. I can only make these offers, sir, because I am naïve. Whatever function you find for me, of course I will fulfil."

"I hope so," he said. "I will tell you at once that this house is not safe. They are too interested in it. Too interested in you. And something else here."

"My old black sword, I think."

"Exactly. And a cup?"

"Believe me, Herr El, they spoke of a cup, but I have no idea what they meant. We have no legendary chalice at Bek. And if we had, we would not hide our honour!"



"Just so," murmured Herr El. "I do not believe you have the chalice, either. But the sword is important. It must not become their property."

"Does it have more symbolic meaning than I knew?"

"The meanings to be derived from that particular blade, Count Ulric, are, I would say, almost infinite."

I found this mystical tenor discomfiting and attempted to change the subject. The air was growing cold again and I had begun to shiver a little. "Do you think Herr Hitler will last? My guess is that his rank and file will pull him down. They are already grumbling about betrayal."

"One should not underestimate a weakling who has spent most of his life dreaming of power, studying power, yearning for power. That he has no ability to handle power is unfortunate, but he believes that the more he has, the easier it will be for him to control. We are dealing with a mind, Count Ulric, that is at once deeply banal and profoundly mad. Because such minds are beyond our common experience, we do our best to make them seem more ordinary, more palatable to us. We give them motive and meaning which are closer to our own. Their motives are raw, dear Count. Savage. Uncivilized."

I found this a little melodramatic for my somewhat puritanical education. "Don't some of his followers call him Lucky Adolf?" I asked. "Isn't he just a nasty little street orator who has, by sheer chance, been elevated to the Chancellory? Are his banalities not simply those you will find in the head of any ordinary Austrian *petites bourgeois*? Which is why he's so popular."

"I agree that his ideas mirror those you'll find in any small-town shopkeeper, but they are elevated by a psychopathic vision. Even the words of Jesus, Count Ulric, can be reduced to sentimental banalities. Who can truly describe or even recognize genius? We can judge by action and by what those actions accomplish. Hitler's strength could be that he was dismissed too readily by people of our class and background."

"You don't believe in men of destiny, then, Herr El?"

"On the contrary. I believe that every so often the world creates a creature which represents either its very best or its very worst desires. Every so often that monster goes out of control and it is left to certain of us, who call themselves by various names, to fight that monster and to show that it can be wounded, if not destroyed. Not all of us use guns or swords. Some use words and the ballot box. But sometimes the result is the same. For it is motive, in the end, which the public must examine in its leaders. And, given time, that is exactly what a mature democracy does. But when it is frightened and bullied into bigotry it no longer behaves like a mature democracy. And that is when our Hitlers move in. I believe that Hitler represents the demonic aggression of a nation drowning in its own orthodoxies."

"And who represents the angelic qualities of that nation, Herr El? The communists?"

"The invisible people mostly," he replied seriously. "The ordinary heroes and heroines of these appalling conflicts between corrupted Chaos and degenerate Law as the multiverse grows tired and her denizens lack the will or the means to help her renew herself."

"A gloomy prospect," I said quite cheerfully. I understood the philosophical position and looked forward to arguing it over a glass or two of punch. My spirits lightened considerably and I suggested that perhaps we could go discretely into the house and draw the curtains before my people turned on the gas. He glanced towards the young Diana, who had still to remove her spectacles, and she seemed to acquiesce.

I led the way up the steps to the verandah and from there through French doors into my study, where I drew the heavy velvet curtains and lit the oil-lamp which stood on my desk. My visitors looked curiously at my packed bookshelves, the clutter of documents, maps and old volumes over every surface, the lamplight giving everything golden warmth and contrast, their shadows falling upon my library as gracefully they moved from shelf to shelf. It was as if they had been deprived of books for too long. But even as they quested about my books, the young Diana and Herr El continued to question me, continued to elaborate as if they sought the limits of my intellectual capacity. Eventually, they seemed satisfied. Then they asked if they could see *Ravenbrand*. I almost refused, so protective had I become of my trust. But I was certain of their credentials. There was no way that they were not enemies of my enemies and that they meant me no ill.

And so, overcoming my fear of betrayal, I led my visitors down into the system of cellars and tunnels which ran deep beneath our foundations and whose passages led, according to old stories, into mysterious realms. The most mysterious realm I had encountered was the cavern of natural rock, cold and strangely dry, in which I had buried our oldest heirloom, the *Ravenbrand*. I stooped and drew back the stones which seemed part of the wall and, reaching into the cavity, brought out the hard case I had commissioned. I laid the case on an old deal table in the middle of the cave and took a key on my keychain to unlock it.

Even as I threw back the lid to show them the sword, some strange trick of the air caused the blade to begin murmuring and singing, like an old man in his dotage, and I was momentarily blinded not by a light, but by a blackness which seemed to blaze from the blade and was then gone. As I blinked against that strange phenomenon I thought I saw another figure standing near the wall. A figure of exactly the same height and general shape as myself, its white face staring hard into mine, its red eyes blazing with a mixture of anger and perhaps mocking intelligence. Then the apparition had gone and I was reaching into the case to take out the great two-handed sword, which could be used so readily in one. I offered the hilt to Herr El but he declined firmly, almost as if he was afraid to touch it. The woman, too, kept her distance from the sword and a moment or two later I closed the case, replacing it in the wall.

"She seems to behave a little differently in company," I said. I tried to make light of something which had disturbed me, yet I could not be absolutely sure what it was. I did not want to believe that the sword had supernatural qualities, and began to wonder if perhaps the couple were

tricking me in some way. But I had no sense of levity or of deception. Neither had wanted to be near the blade. They shared my fear of its oddness.

"It is the Black Sword," Herr El told the huntress. "And soon we shall find out if it still has a soul."

I must have raised an eyebrow at this. I think he smiled. "I suppose I sound fanciful to you, Count Ulric. I apologize. I am so used to speaking in metaphor and symbol that I sometimes forget my ordinary language."

We were walking out of the chamber now, back up the narrow twisting stair that would take us to a corridor and from there to a door and another flight or two of steps where, if we were lucky, the air would become easier to breathe.

The scene felt far too close to something from a melodramatic version of Wagner for my taste and I was glad to be back in the study, where my guests again began to move amongst my books, even as we continued our strange conversation. They were not impolite, merely profoundly curious. It was no doubt their curiosity which had brought them to their present situation, that and a common feeling for humanity. While in no way antagonistic to them, I felt that perhaps these visitors, too, had come for something and been disappointed.

Then suddenly the young woman had murmured something to the tall man who put down his unfinished drink and began to move rapidly, with her, towards the French doors and the verandah beyond.

"One of us will contact you again, soon. But remember, you are in great danger. While the sword is hidden, they will let you live. Fear not, Herr Count, you will serve the White Rose."

I saw them melt into the darkness beyond the verandah.

That night I dreamed I again flew on the back of a dragon. This time the scene was peaceful. I soared over the slender towers and minarets of a fantastic city which blazed with vivid colours. I knew the name of the city. I knew that it was my home.

But home though it was, sight of it filled me with longing and anguish and at length I turned the dragon away, flying gracefully over the massing waters of a dark and endless ocean. Flying towards the great silver-gold disc of the moon which filled the horizon.

I was awakened early that morning by the sound of cars in the drive. When I was at last able to find my dressing gown and go to a front window I saw that there were three vehicles outside. All official. Two were Mercedes saloons and one was a black police van. I was familiar enough with the scene. No doubt someone had come to arrest me.

Or perhaps they only intended to frighten me.

I thought of leaving by a back door but then imagined the indignity of being caught by guards posted there. I heard voices in the hallway now. Nobody was shouting. I heard a servant say they would wake me.

I went back to my room and when the servant arrived I told him I would be down shortly. I washed, shaved and groomed myself, put on my army uniform and then began to descend the stairs to the hall where two Gestapo plain-clothes men, distinguished by identical leather

coats, waited. The occupants of the other vehicles must, as I suspected, have been positioned around the house.

"Good morning, gentlemen." I paused on one of the bottom stairs. "How can we help you?" Banal remarks, but somehow appropriate here.

"Count Ulric von Bek?" The speaker had been less successful shaving. His face was covered in tiny nicks, perhaps the remains of blackheads. His swarthy companion looked young and a little nervous.

"The same," I said. "And you, gentlemen, are —"

"We understand you to be in possession of certain state property. My orders, Count, are to receive that property or hold you liable for its safety. If, for instance, it has been lost, you alone can be held to account for failing in your stewardship. Believe me, sir, we have no wish to cause you any distress. This matter can be quickly brought to a satisfactory conclusion."

"I give you my family heirloom or you arrest me?"

"As you can see, Herr Count, we should in the end be successful. So would you like to reach that conclusion from behind the wire of a concentration camp or would you rather reach it in the continuing comfort of your own home?"

His threatening sarcasm made me impatient. "I would guess my company would be better in the camp," I told him.

And so, before I had had my breakfast, I was arrested, handcuffed and placed in the van whose hard seats were constantly threatening to throw me to the floor as we bumped over the old road from Bek. No shouts. No threats of violence. No swearing. Just a smooth transition. One moment I was free, captain of my own fate, the next I was a prisoner, no longer the possessor of my own body. The reality was beginning to impinge rapidly well before the van stopped and I was ordered, far less politely, to step into the coldness of some kind of courtyard. An old castle, perhaps? Something they had turned into a prison? The walls and cobbles were in bad repair. The place seemed to have been abandoned for some years. There was new barbed wire running along the top and a couple of roughly roofed machine-gun posts. Though my legs would hardly hold me at first, I was shoved through an archway and a series of dirty tunnels to emerge into a large compound full of the kind of temporary huts built for refugees during the War. I realized I had been brought to a fair-sized concentration camp, perhaps the nearest to Bek, but I had no idea of its name until I was bundled through another door, back into the main building and made to stand before some kind of reception officer, who seemed uncomfortable with the situation. I was, after all, in my army uniform, wearing my honours and not evidently a political agitator or foreign spy. I had been determined that they should be confronted by this evidence since, to me at least, it advertised the absurdity of their regime.

I was charged, it seemed, with political activities threatening the property and security of the State and was held under "protective custody." I had not been accused of my crime or allowed to defend myself. But there would have been no point. Everyone engaged in this filthy charade knew that this was merely a piece of play-acting, that the Nazis ruled above a law which they

had openly despised, just as they despised the principles of the Christian religion and all its admonishments.

I was allowed to keep my uniform, but had to give up my leather accoutrements, then I was led deeper into the building, to a small room, like a monk's cell. Here I was told I would stay until my turn came for interrogation.

# 4

I lost my uniform on the first day. Ordered to shower and then finding nothing to wear but black-and-white striped prison clothes, far too small for me, with a red "political" star sewn on them, I was given no choice. While I dressed, bellowing SA mocked me and made lewd comments reminding me of their leader Rohm's infamous proclivities. I had never anticipated this degree of fear and wretchedness, yet I never once regretted my decision. Their crudeness somehow sustained me. The worse I was treated, the more I was singled out for hardship, the more I came to understand how important my family heirlooms were to the Nazis. That such power should still seek more power revealed how fundamentally insecure these people were. Their creed had been the rationalizations of the displaced, the cowardly, the unvictorious. It was not a creed suited for command. Thus their brutality increased almost daily as their leader and his creatures came to fear even the most minor resistance to their will. And this meant, too, that they were ultimately vulnerable.

My initial interrogation had been harsh, threatening, but I had not suffered much physical violence so far. I think they were giving me a "taste" of camp life in order to soften me up. In other words, I still might find an open gate out of this hell, if I learned my lesson. I was, indeed, learning lessons.

As a relatively honoured prisoner of the Sachsenburg camp, I was given a shared cell in the castle itself, which had been used as a prisoner-of-war camp during the Great War and was run on pretty much the same lines. We "inside" prisoners were given better treatment, slightly better food and some letter-writing privileges, while the "outside" prisoners, in the huts, were regimented in the most barbaric ways and killed almost casually for any violation of the many rules. For "insiders," there was always the threat of going "outside," if you failed to behave yourself.

Give a German of my kind daily terror and every misery, give him the threat of death and the sight of decent human beings murdered and tortured before his helpless eyes, and he will escape, if he can escape at all, into philosophy. There is a level of experience at which your emotions and mind, your soul perhaps, fail to function. They fail to absorb, if you like, the horror around them. You become a kind of zombie.

I suppose I was lucky to share a cell first with a journalist whose work I had read in the Berlin papers, Hans Hellander, and then, by some bureaucratic accident when the "in" cells were filling too fast for the "out," Erich Feld-

mann, who had written as "Henry Grimm," and had been classified as a political rather than with the yellow star of the Jew. Three philosophizing zombies. With two bunks between us, sharing as best we could and sustaining ourselves on swill and the occasional parcel from the foreign volunteers still allowed to work in Germany, we relived the comradeship we had all known in the trenches. Beyond the castle walls, in the "out" huts of the compounds, we frequently heard the most blood-curdling shrieks, the crack of shots, other even more disturbing sounds, less readily identified.

And sleep brought me no benefit, no escape. Still I dreamed of dragons and swords and mighty armies. I thought that I began to see myself in these dreams. A figure almost always in shadow, with its face shaded, that regarded me from hard, steady eyes the colour and depth of rubies. Bleak eyes which held more knowledge than I would care for. Did I look at my future self?

Somehow I saw this doppelgänger as an ally, yet at the same time I was thoroughly afraid of him.

When it was my turn for a bunk, I slept well. Even on the floor of the prison, I usually achieved some kind of rest. The guards were a mixture of SA and members of the prison service, who did their best to follow old regulations and see that we were properly treated. This was impossible, by the old standards, but it still meant we occasionally saw a doctor and very rarely one of us was released back to his family.

After about two months of this, I was summoned from my cell one day by SA Oberstadsführer Hahn whom we'd come to fear, especially when he was accompanied, as now, by two uniformed thugs we knew as Fritz and Franz, since one was tall and thin while the other was short and fat and they reminded us of the famous cartoon characters.

I was marched between Fritz and Franz up and down stairs, down tunnels and corridors until I was brought at last to the commandant's office where Major Hausleiter, a corrupt old drunk who would have been drummed out of any decent army, awaited me. Since my reception, when he had seemed embarrassed, I had only seen him at a distance. Now he seemed nervous. Something was in the air and I had a feeling that Hausleiter would be the last to know what was really going on. He told me that I was being paroled on "humanitarian leave" under the charge of my cousin, Major von Minct, for a "trial period." He advised me to keep my nose clean and co-operate with people who only had my good at heart. If I returned to Sachsenburg, it might not be with the same privileges.

Someone had found me my own clothes. Doubtless Gaynor or one of his people had brought them from Bek. The shirt and suit hung on my thinner-than-usual body, but I dressed carefully, tying the laces of my shoes, making a neat knot of my tie, determined to look as well as possible when I confronted my cousin.

Escorted into the castle courtyard by Fritz and Franz, I found Prince Gaynor waiting beside his car. Klosterheim was not with him, but the glowering driver was the



same. Gaynor raised his hand in that ridiculous "salute" borrowed from American movie versions of Roman history and bid me good afternoon.

I got into the car without a word. I was smiling to myself.

When we were driving through the gates and leaving the prison behind, Gaynor asked me why I was smiling.

"I was simply amused by the lengths of play-acting you and your kind are willing to allow yourselves. And apparently without embarrassment."

He shrugged. "Some of us find it easier to ape the absurd. After all, the world has become completely absurd, has it not?"

"The humorous aspects are a little wasted on some of those camp inmates," I said. In prison I had met journalists, doctors, lawyers, scientists, musicians, most of whom had been brutalized in some way. "All they can see are degenerate brutes pulling down a culture and a society which baffles and disturbs them because they cannot understand it. Bigotry elevated to the status of law and politics. A decline into a barbarism worse than we knew in the Middle Ages, with the ideas of that time turned into 'truth.' They are told obvious lies – that some 640,000 Jewish citizens somehow control the majority of the population. Yet every German knows at least one 'good' Jew, which means that there are 60 million 'good' Jews in the country. Which means that the 'bad' Jews are heavily outnumbered by the 'good.' A problem Goebbels has yet to solve."

"Oh, I'm sure he will in time." Gaynor had removed his cap and was unbuttoning his uniform jacket. "The best lies are those which carry the familiarity of truth with them. And the familiar lie often sounds like the truth, even to the most refined of us. A resonant story, you know, will do the trick with the right delivery."

I must admit the Spring air was refreshing and I enjoyed the long drive to Bek. I scarcely wanted it to end, since I had anxieties about what I might find at my home. After asking me how I had liked the camp, Gaynor said very little to me as we drove along. He was less full of himself than the last I'd seen him. I wondered if he had made promises to his masters which he'd been unable to keep.

It was dusk before we passed through Bek's gates and came to a stop in the drive outside our main door. The house was unusually dark. I asked what had happened to the servants. They had resigned, I was told, once they realized they had been working for a traitor. One had even died of shame.

I asked his name.

"Reiter," I believe.

I knew that feeling had returned. My spirits sank. My oldest, most faithful retainer. Had they killed him asking him questions about me?

"The coroner reported that Reiter died of shame, eh?"

"Officially, of course, it was the heart attack." Gaynor stepped out into the darkness and opened my door for me. "But I'm sure two resourceful fellows like us will be able to make ourselves at home."

"You're staying?"

"Naturally," he said. "You are in my custody, after all."

Together we ascended the steps. There was a crude

padlock on our door. Gaynor called the driver to come forward and open it. Then we stepped into a house that smelled strongly of damp and neglect and worse. There was no gas or electricity, but the driver discovered some candles and oil-lamps and with the help of these I surveyed the wreckage of my home.

It had been ransacked.

Most things of value were gone. Pictures had vanished from walls. Vases. Ornaments. The library had disappeared. Everything else was scattered and broken where Gaynor's thugs had clearly left it. Not a room in the house was undamaged. In some cases where there was nothing at all of value, men had urinated and defecated in the rooms. Only fire, I thought, could possibly cleanse the place now.

"The police seem to have been a little untidy in their searches," Gaynor said lightly. His face was thrown into sharp, demonic contrast by the oil-lamp's light. His dark eyes glittered with unwholesome pleasure.

I knew too much self-discipline and was far too physically weak to throw myself on him, but the impulse was there. But, as anger came back, so, in a strange way, did life.

"Did you supervise this disgusting business?" I asked him.

"I'm afraid I was in Berlin during most of the search. By the time I arrived, Klosterheim and his people had created this. Naturally, I berated them."

He didn't expect to be believed. His tone of mockery remained.

"You were looking for a sword, no doubt."

"And a cup, cousin. Your famous cup."

"Famous, apparently, amongst Nazis," I retorted, "but not amongst civilized human beings. Presumably you found nothing."

"They're well hidden."

"Or perhaps they do not exist."

"Our orders are to tear the place down, stone by stone and beam by beam, until it is nothing but debris, if we have to. You could save all this, dear cousin. You could save yourself. You could be sure of spending your life in contentment, an honoured citizen of the Third Reich. Do you not yearn for these things, cousin?"

"Not at all, cousin. I'm more comfortable than I was in the trenches. I have better company. What I yearn for is altogether more general. And perhaps unattainable. I yearn for a just world in which educated men like yourself understand their responsibilities to the people, in which issues are decided by informed public debate, not by bigotry and filthy rhetoric."

"What? Sachsenburg hasn't shown you the folly of your childish idealism? Perhaps it's time for you to visit Dachau or some camp where you will be a little less comfortable than you were in those damned trenches. Ulric, don't you think those trenches didn't mean something to me, too?" He had suddenly lost his mockery. "When I had to watch men of both sides dying for nothing, being lied to for nothing, being threatened for nothing. Everything for nothing. And seeing all that nothing, are you surprised someone like myself might not grow cynical and

realize that nothing is all we have in our future?"

"Some come to the same realization but decide we still have it in us to make our life on earth tolerable. Through tolerance and good will, cousin."

He laughed openly at that. He waved a gauntleted hand around the ruins of my study.

"Well, well, cousin. Are you pleased with everything your good will has brought you?"

"It has left me with my dignity and self-respect." Sanctimonious as that sounded, I knew I might never have another chance to say it.

"Oh, dear Ulric. You have seen how we end, have you not? Writhing in filthy ditches trying to push our own guts back into our bodies? Shrieking like terrified rats? Climbing over the corpses of friends to get a crust of dirty bread? And worse. We all saw worse, did we not?"

"And better, perhaps. Some of us saw angels."

"Delusions. We cannot escape the truth. We must make what we can of our hideous world. In truth, cousin, it's safe to say that Satan rules in Germany today. Satan rules everywhere. Haven't you noticed? All the civilized nations of the world, who brought us our great music, our literature, our philosophy and our sophisticated politics. What was the result of all this refinement? Gas warfare? Tanks? War aeroplanes? If I seem contemptuous of you, cousin, it is because you insist on seeking the delusion. I have respect only for people like myself, who see the truth for what it is, and make sure their own lives are not made wretched by allegiance to some worthless principle, some noble ideal. The Nazis are right. Life is a matter of brute struggle. Nothing else is real. Nothing."

Again, I was amused. I found his ideas worthless and foolish, entirely self-pitying. The logic of a weak man who had arrogantly assumed himself stronger than he was. I had seen others like him. Their own failures become the failures of whole classes, governments, races or nations. Self-pity translated into aggression is an unpredictable and unworthy force.

"Your self-esteem seems to rise in direct proportion to the decline of your self-respect," I said.

As if from habit, he swung on me, raising his gloved fist. Then my eyes locked with his and he dropped his arm, turning away. "Oh, cousin, you understand so little of mankind's capacity for cruelty," he hissed. "I trust you'll have no further experience of it. Just tell me where the sword and cup are hidden."

"I know nothing of a cup and sword," I said. That was the closest I came to lying. I wanted to go no further than that. My own sense of honour demanded I stop.

Gaynor sighed, tapping his foot on the old boards. "Where could you have hidden it? We found its case. No doubt where you left it for us. In that cellar. The first place we searched. I guessed you'd be naïve enough to bury your treasures as deep as you could. A few taps on the wall and we found the cavity. But we had underestimated you. What did you do with that sword, cousin?"

I almost laughed aloud. Had someone else stolen *Ravenbrand*? Someone who held it in no particular value? No wonder the house was in such a condition.

Gaynor was like a wolf. His eyes continued to search

the walls and crannies. He paced nervously as he talked.

"We know the sword's in the house. You didn't take it away. You didn't give it to your visitors. So where did you put it, cousin?"

"The last I saw *Ravenbrand* was in that case."

He was disgusted. "How can someone so idealistic be such a thorough-going liar? Who else could have taken the sword from the case, cousin? We interrogated all the servants. Even old Reiter didn't confess until his confession was clearly meaningless. Which left you, cousin. Not up the chimneys. Not under the floorboards. Not in a secret panel or a cupboard. We know how to search these old places. Not in the attics or the eaves or the beams or the walls, as far as we can discover. Would you like to see Reiter, by the way? It might take you a while to spot something about him that you recognize."

Having nothing to gain from controlling my anger, I had the satisfaction of striking him one good blow on the ear, like a bad schoolboy.

"Be quiet, Gaynor. You sound as banal as a villain from a melodrama. Whatever you did to Reiter or do to me, I'm sure it's the foulest thing your foul brain could invent."

"Flattering me at this late stage is a little pointless." He grumbled to himself as, rubbing his ear, he marched about the ruins of my study. He had become used to his brutish power. He acted like a frustrated ape. He was trying to recover himself, but hardly knew how any more.

At last he regained some of his poise. "There are a couple of beds upstairs which are still all right. We'll sleep there. I'll let you consider your problem overnight. And then I'll cheerfully give you up to the mercies of Dachau."

And so, in the bedroom where my mother had given birth to me and where she had eventually died, I slept, handcuffed to the bed post with my worst enemy in the other bed. My dreams were of a tall man, standing alone in a glade. A man who was my double. Whose crimson eyes stared into my crimson eyes and who murmured urgent words I could not hear. And I knew a terror deeper than anything I had so far experienced. For a moment I thought I saw the sword. And I awoke screaming.

Much to Gaynor's satisfaction.

"So you've come to your senses," he said. He sat up in a bed covered with feminine linen. It was an incongruous sight. He jumped out of bed in his silk underwear and rang a bell. A few moments later, Gaynor's driver arrived with his uniform almost perfectly pressed. I was uncuffed and my own clothes were handed to me in a pillowcase. I did my best to look as smart as possible while Gaynor waited impatiently for his turn in the only surviving bathroom.

The driver served us bread and cheese on plates he had evidently cleaned himself. I saw rat droppings on the floor but recalled what I had to look forward to. I ate the food. It might be my last.

"Is the sword somewhere in the grounds?" asked Gaynor. His manner had changed, had become eager.

I finished my cheese and smiled at him cheerfully. "I have no idea where the sword is," I said. I was light-hearted because I had no need to lie. "It appears to have vanished of its own volition. Perhaps it followed the cup."

Gaynor was snarling as he stood up. His hand fell on the holstered pistol at his belt, at which I laughed more heartily. "What a charlatan you have become, cousin. Clearly you should be acting in films. How can you know if I'm telling you the truth or not?"

"My orders are not to offer you any kind of public martyrdom." His voice was so low, so furious, that I could hardly hear it. "To make sure that you died nice and quietly and well away from the public eye. It's the only thing, cousin, that makes me hold back from testing your grip on the truth myself. So you'll be returned to the pleasures of Sachsenburg and from there you'll be sent on to a real camp, where they know how to deal with vermin of your kind."

Then he kicked me deliberately in the groin and slapped my face.

I was still handcuffed.

Gaynor's driver led me from my house and back into the car.

This time Gaynor sat me in the front with the driver while he lounged, smoking and scowling, in the back. As far as I know, he never looked at me directly again.

His masters were no doubt beginning to think they had overestimated him. As he had me. I guessed that the sword had been saved by Herr El, "Diana" and the White Rose Society and would be used by them against Hitler. My own death, my own silence, would not now be wasted.

I made the best use I could of the journey and slept a little, ate all that was available, dozed again, so that we had driven back through the gates and were in the great black shadow of Sachsenburg Castle before I realized it.

Fritzi and Franzi were waiting for me. They came forward almost eagerly as I stepped from the car.

They were clearly pleased to see me back.

They had clubbed me to the ground, in fact, and were in the process of beating my skinny body black and blue before Gaynor's car had gone roaring back into the night. I heard a voice from a window above and then I was being dragged, almost insensibly, back to my cell where Hellander and Feldmann attempted to deal with the worst of my bruises as I lay in agony on a bunk.

The next morning they didn't come for me. They came for Feldmann. They understood how to test me. I was by no means sure I would not fail.

When Feldmann returned he no longer had any teeth. His mouth was a weeping red wound and one of his eyes seemed permanently closed.

"For God's sake." He spoke indistinctly, every movement of his face painful. "Don't tell them where that sword is."

"Believe me," I told him, "I don't know where it is. But I wish with all my soul that I held it in my hands at this moment."

Small comfort to Feldmann. They took him again in the morning, while he screamed at them for the cowards they were, and they brought him back in the afternoon. Ribs were broken. Several fingers. A foot. He was breathing with difficulty, as if something pressed on his lungs.

He told me not to give up. That they were not defeat-

ing us. They were not dividing us.

Both Hellander and I were weeping as we did our best to ease his pain. But they took him again for a third day. And that night, with nothing left of him that had not been tortured, inside and out, he died in our arms and when I looked into Hellander's eyes I saw that he was terrified. We knew exactly what they were doing. He guessed that he would be next.

And then, even as Feldmann gave out his last thin gasp of life, I looked beyond Hellander and saw, distinct, yet vaguely insubstantial, my doppelgänger. That strange, cloaked albino whose eyes were mine.

And for the first time I thought I heard him speak.

"The sword," he said.

Hellander was looking away from me, looking to where the albino had stood. I asked him if he had seen anything. He shook his head. We laid Feldmann out on the flagstones and tried to say some useful service for him. But Hellander was in bad shape and I did not know how to help him. He found his means of escape as I slept.

My dreams were of my doppelgänger in his hooded cape, of the lost black sword and of the young woman archer whom I had nicknamed Diana. No dragons or ornamented cities. No armies. No monsters. Just my own face staring at me, desperate to communicate something. And then the sword. I could almost feel it in my hands.

Half-roused, I heard Hellander overhead. I asked him if he was all right. He said that he was fine.

In the morning I awoke to find his hanging body turning slowly in the air above Feldmann's.

It was a full 24 hours before the guards removed the corpses from my cell.



Fritzi and Franzi came for me a couple of days later. They didn't bother to move me. They took out their blackjacks and beat me up on the spot. They enjoyed their work and had become very expert at it, commenting on my responses, the reaction of my strange, pale body to their blows. The peculiar colour of the bruises. They complained, however, that I was hard to get sounds out of. It was a problem they thought they would solve over time.

Shortly after they left, I received a visit from Klosterheim, now an SS captain, who offered me something from a hip flask which I refused.

"A sequence of very unfortunate accidents, eh?" He looked around my cell. "You must find all this a bit depressing, Herr Count."

"Oh, it means I don't have to mix too much with Nazis," I said. "So I suppose I am at an advantage."

"Your notion of advantage is rather hard for me to grasp," he said. "It seems to get you in this sort of predicament. How long did it take our SA boys to finish off your friend Feldmann? Of course, you could be a little fitter, a little younger. How long was it? Three days?"

"Feldmann's triumph?" I said. "Three days in which every word he had written about you was proven. You



confirmed his judgment in every detail. You gave extra authority to everything he published. No writer can feel better than that.”

“These are martyr’s victories, however. Intelligent men would call them meaningless.”

“Only stupid men who believed themselves intelligent would call them that,” I said. “And we all know how ludicrous such strutting fellows are.” I was glad of his presence. My hatred of him took my mind off my injuries. “I’ll tell you now, Herr Captain, that I have no sword to give you and no cup, either. Whatever you believe, you are wrong. I will be happy to die with you believing otherwise, but I would not like others to die on my behalf. In your assumption of power, sir, you have also assumed responsibility, whether you like it or not. You can’t have one without the other. So I present you with your guilt.”

I turned my back on him and he left immediately.

A few hours later Fritz and Franz arrived to carry on their experiments. When I passed out, I immediately had a vision of my doppelgänger. He was speaking urgently, but I still couldn’t hear him. Then he vanished and was replaced by the black sword, whose iron now ran with strange scarlet symbols and which was constantly washed with blood.

When I woke I was naked. There was no blanket on my bed. I understood at once that they meant to kill me. It was a standard method to starve and expose a prisoner until they were too weak to withstand infection, usually pneumonia. They used it usually when you refused to die of a heart attack. I also guessed this “message” was a bluff. If they still thought I could lead them to that sword or the cup they set such store by, they wouldn’t kill me.

In fact Major Hausleiter came to my cell himself at one point. He had Klosterheim with him. I think he attempted to reason with me, but he was so inarticulate he made no sense. Klosterheim reminded me that his patience was over and made some other villainous, ridiculous threat. What do you threaten the damned with? I was too weak, this time, to make any significant retort. But I managed something like a smile, through my broken mouth.

I leaned forward, as if to whisper a secret and watched with satisfaction as, drop by drop, my blood fell upon his perfect uniform. It took him a moment to realize what had happened. He pulled back in baffled disgust, pushing me away so that I fell to the floor.

The door slammed and there was silence. Nobody else was being tortured tonight. When I tried to rise I saw another figure sitting on my bunk. It was my doppelgänger. He made a gesture and then seemed to fold downwards onto the bare mattress.

I crawled to the bunk. My double had gone. But in his place was the *Ravenbrand*. My own sword. The sword they all sought. I reached out to touch the familiar steel and as I did so it, too, vanished. Yet I knew I had imagined nothing. Somehow the sword would find me again.

Not before Fritz and Franz had returned once more. Even as they beat me they discussed my staying power. They thought I could take one more “general physical” and then they would let me rest up for a day or two or

they would probably lose me. Major von Minct was arriving later. He might have some ideas.

As the door slammed and was locked, leaving me in darkness, I saw my doppelgänger clearly framed there. The figure almost glowed. Then it had crossed to the bunk. I turned my head painfully, but the man was gone. I knew I was not hallucinating. I had a feeling that if I had the strength to get to my bed I would see the sword again.

Somehow the thought drove me to find energy from nothing. Bit by bit I crawled to the bunk and this time my hand touched cold metal. The hilt of the Raven sword. Fraction by fraction I worked my fingers until they had closed around the hilt. Perhaps this was a dying man’s delusion, but the metal felt solid enough. Even as my hand gripped it, the sword made a low crooning noise, almost of welcome, like a cat purring. I was determined to hang on to it, not to let it vanish again, even though I had no strength to lift it.

Strangely, the metal seemed to be warm, passing energy into my hands and wrists, giving me the means to raise myself up onto the bunk and lie with my body shielding the sword from anyone looking in to the cell. There was a vibrancy about the metal which I had never quite noticed before. It was as if the sword were actually alive. While this thought was disturbing, it did not seem as bizarre as it might have done a few months earlier.

I do not really know if a day passed or if it was later that night that Franz and Fritz arrived. They had brought some prison clothes and were yelling at me to get up. They were taking me to see Major von Minct.

I had been gathering my strength and praying for this moment. I had the sword gripped in both hands and as I turned I lifted the blade and threw my body weight behind it. The point caught short fat Franz in the stomach and slid into him with frightening ease. He began to gulp. Behind him Fritz was transfixed, unsure what was happening.

Franz screamed. It was a long, cold, anguished scream.

When it had stopped, I was standing on my feet, blocking Fritz from reaching the door. He sobbed. Clearly something about me terrified him. Perhaps my sudden energy. I was full of power now. It had an edgy, unnatural feel, but I was glad of it. It was almost as if I had sucked Franz’s life-stuff from him and drawn it into my own body. Disgusting as this idea might be, I considered it without emotion even as, with familiar skill I knocked Fritz’s bludgeon from his red, peasant hand and drove the point of my sword directly into his pumping heart, so that blood gushed across the cell, covering my naked flesh.

And I laughed at this and suddenly on my lips there formed an alien word. One I had heard only in my dreams.

“*Arioch!*” I shrieked as I killed. “*Arioch!*”

And now, still naked, with broken ribs and ruined face, with one leg which would hardly support my weight, with arms that seemed too thin to hold that great iron battle-blade, I picked up Franz’s keys and padded down the darkness of the corridor, unlocking the cell doors as I went. There was no resistance until I reached the guard

room at the far end of the passage. Here a few fat SA lads sat around drowsing off their beer. They only knew they were being killed as they awoke to feel my steel entering their bodies and somehow adding to the power which now raged through my veins, making me forget all pain, all broken bones, as I screamed out that single name and within moments turned the room into a charnel house.

Once, the civilized man would have known revulsion, but that civilized man had been beaten out of me by the Nazis and all that was left was this raging, bloodthirsty, near-insensate revenging monster that I had become. And I did not resist that monster. It wanted to kill. I let it kill. I think I was laughing. I think I called out for Gaynor to come and find me. I had the sword he wanted. It was waiting for him.

Now, behind me in the corridors, prisoners were emerging, clearly not sure if this was a trick of some kind. I flung them every key in the guard room and made my way out into the night.

Even as I reached the courtyard lights began to come on in the castle as they heard unfamiliar screams and disturbing noises from the prison quarters. But I was already loping like an old, wounded wolf across the compound towards the ranks of huts where the less fortunate prisoners were kept. Anything that threatened me or tried to shoot at me, I killed. The sword was a scythe which swept away wooden gates, barbed wire and men, all at once. I hacked down the wooden legs of a machine-gun post and saw the thing collapse onto the wire, making escape possible. And in no time at all I was at the huts, striking off the padlocks and bolts which held the doors.

I don't know how many Nazis I had killed before every hut was opened and the prisoners, many of them still terrified, began to pour out. Up on the castle walls they had got a searchlight working and I heard the pop of their shots as they aimed into the prisoners, apparently at random. Then I saw a group of stripe-uniformed inmates swarm up the wall and get to the searchlight. Within seconds the compound was in darkness as other lights were smashed. I heard Major Hausleiter's voice, crazed with a dozen different kinds of fear, yelling over the general *melée*.

God knows what any of them made of me, holding a great leaf-bladed longsword in one ruined hand, with my bone-white skin covered in blood, my crimson eyes blazing with the ecstasy of unbridled vengeance as I called out an alien name.

*Arioch! Arioch!*

Whatever demon possessed me, it did not have my feelings about the sanctity of life. Had this monster always lain within me, waiting to be awakened? Or was it my doppelgänger, whom I confused with the sword itself, who drew such wild satisfaction from my unrelenting blood-letting?

Machine-gun fire now began to spatter around me. I ran with the other prisoners for the safety of the walls and huts. Some of the prisoners, who had clearly had experience of street fighting, quickly collected the

weapons of the men I had killed. Soon shots were spitting back from the darkness and at least one machine gun was silenced.

With the camp now in total confusion, I went back into the castle and began to climb stairs, looking for Gaynor's quarters.

I had barely reached the second floor when ahead of me I saw the same hooded huntress, whom I had seen earlier with Herr El, that mysterious "Diana" who had also appeared in my dreams. Her eyes, as usual, were hidden behind smoked glasses.

"You have no time for Gaynor," she said. "We must get away from here soon or it will be too late. They have a whole garrison of stormtroopers in Sachsenburg village and someone is bound to have got through on the telephone. Come, follow me. We have a car."

How had she got inside the prison? Had she brought me the sword? Or was it my doppelgänger? Did they work together? Was she my rescuer? Impressed by the White Rose's powers, I obeyed her. I had already put myself at the society's service and was prepared to follow their orders.

Some of the battle-lust was already leaving me. But the strange, dark energy remained. I felt as if I had swallowed a powerful drug which could have destructive side-effects. But I was careless of any consequences. I was at last taking revenge on the brutes who had already murdered so many innocents. I was not proud of the new emotions which raged through my body, but I did not reject them, either.

I followed the hooded woman back into the *melée* of the compound towards the main gate. The guards were already dead. The huntress stopped to pull her arrows from their corpses as she unlocked the gates and led me through, just as the emergency lighting system began to flicker on. Now the freed prisoners were flooding towards the gates and rushing past us into the night. At least some of them would not die nameless, painful and undignified deaths.

As we reached the open roadway, I heard a motor bellow into life. Headlights came on and I heard three short notes on its horn. My huntress led me towards the big car. A handsome man of about 40, wearing a dark uniform I couldn't identify, saluted from behind the steering wheel. He was already driving forward as we climbed in beside him. He spoke good German with a distinctly English accent. "Honoured to meet you, dear Count. I'm Captain Oswald Bastable, at your service. We've got some clothes for you in the back, but we'll have to stop later. The schedules looking a bit tight at the moment."

A few shots spat up dirt around us and at least one bullet struck the car.

My strange battle rage was passing now and I looked down at my ruined body, realizing that I was a mass of blood and bruises. Stark naked. With a bloody longsword in the broken fingers of my right hand. I must have been a nightmarish sight. I tried to thank the Englishman, but was thrown back in my seat as with her famous roar the powerful Duesenberg bore us rapidly along a country

road, straight towards a mass of approaching headlights. No doubt these were the stormtroopers from Sachsenburg town.

Captain Bastable seemed unperturbed. He was slipping Nazi armbands on his sleeves. "You'd better act as if you're knocked out," he said to me. As the first trucks approached, he slowed down and waved a commanding hand from the car. He gave the Hitler salute and spoke rapidly to the driver, telling him to be careful. Prisoners were escaping. They had taken many guards captive and forced them to wear prison stripes before turning them loose into the countryside. There was every chance that if they shot at a man without being sure who he was, they could be killing one of their own.

This preposterous story would create considerable confusion and probably save a few prisoners' lives. Saying he had urgent business in Berlin, Bastable convinced the stormtroopers, who were rarely the brightest individuals, and they roared off into the night.

Bastable kept up his own high speed for several hours, until we were climbing a narrow road between masses of dark pines and I was reminded of the Harz Mountains where I had often hiked as a boy. At last I saw a sign for Magdeburg. Thirty kilometres. Sachsenburg lay, of course, to the east of Magdeburg, which was north of the Harz. Another sign at a cross-roads. Halberstadt, Magdeburg and Berlin one way, Bad Harzburg, Hildesheim and Hanover the other. We took the Hanover road but before Hildesheim, Bastable drove into a series of narrow, winding lanes, switching off his car's lights and slowing down. He was buying time, he hoped.

Eventually he stopped near a brook with wide shallow sides. It was easy for me to climb down and wash myself thoroughly in the icy water. Cold as I was, I felt purified and dried myself with the towels Bastable had provided. I hesitated a little when I realized that the clothes he had brought for me were my own, but of the kind one wore for hunting, even down to the knee-high leather boots, tweed britches and a three-eared cap, what they call a deerstalker in England, which I fastened under my chin. I must have looked like a whiteface clown posing as a country gentleman, but the cap covered my white hair and I could be less readily identified by anyone who had been given a description of us. I pulled on the stout jacket and felt ready for anything. Psychologically, the clothes made me feel much better. I wasn't too sure whether they would look as good with a longsword as a twelve-bore, but perhaps if I wrapped the sword in something it would be less incongruous.

Bastable had the manner and appearance of an experienced soldier. He was reading a map when I came back and shaking his head. "Every bloody town begins with an H around here," he complained. "I get them mixed up. I think I should have taken a right at Holzminden. Or was it Hoxter? Anyway, it looks as if I overshot my turning. We seem to be halfway to Hamm. It'll be daylight fairly soon and I want to get this car out of sight. We have friends in Detmold and in Lemgo. I think we can make it to Lemgo before dawn."

"Are you taking us out of the country?" I asked. "Is that our only choice?"





"Well, it will probably come to that." Bastable's handsome, somewhat aquiline face, was thoughtful. "I'd hoped to get all the way tonight. It would have made a big difference. But if we hole up in Lemgo, which is pretty hard to reach, we'll still have a chance of getting clear of Gaynor. Of course, Klosterheim will probably guess where we're eventually heading if the car has been recognized. But I took roads that were little-travelled. We'll sleep in Lemgo and be ready for the next part of our journey tomorrow evening."

That was as much as I remembered before I fell into an exhausted doze and woke up as the car began to bounce and flounder all over a steep, badly-made road, full of potholes, which Bastable was negotiating as best he could. And then suddenly, outlined against the first touch of dawn on the horizon, I saw the most extraordinary array of roofs, chimneys and gables, which made Bek look positively modern. This was an illustration from a children's fairy tale. It was as if we had driven in our huge modern motor car to the world of Hansel and Gretel, and entered a mediaeval fantasy.

We had arrived, of course, in Lemgo, that strangely self-conscious town which had embellished every aspect of its own picture-book appearance in the most elaborate ways. Its quaintness disguised a dark and terrible history. I had been here once or twice when on walking holidays, but had stayed only briefly because of the tourists.

Our route from Sachsenburg had been circuitous but could well have thrown any pursuers off our scent. I asked no questions. I was too exhausted and I understood the White Rose Society needed to be discrete with its secrets. I was content, at that moment, to be free of what had been several kinds of extended nightmare.

I wondered if Lemgo had any significance for my librarians. It was the essence of German quaintness. A fortified town, a member of the Hanseatic League, it had known real power, but now it was almost determinedly a backwater, still under the patronage of the Dukes of Lippe, to whom we were distantly related. Its streets were a marvel, for the residents vied with one another to produce the most elaborate house fronts, carved with every kind of beast and character from folklore, inscribed with Biblical quotations and lines from Goethe, painted with coats of arms and tableaux showing the region's mythical history.

The burgomeister's house had a relief depicting a lion attacking a mother and her child while two men vainly tried to frighten the creature away. The house known as Old Lemgo was festooned with plant patterns of every possible description, but the most elaborate house of all, I remembered, was called the Hexenburgermeisterhaus, the 16th-century House of the Burgermeister of the Witches in Breitestrasse. I had a glimpse of it as the car moved quietly through the sleeping streets. Its massive front rose gracefully in scalloped gables to the niche at the top where Christ held the world in his hands, while further down Adam and Eve supported a lower gable. Every part of the woodwork was richly and fancifully carved. You could not have a more German building. Its sweetness, however, was marred a little when you knew

that its name came from the famous witch-burner, Burgermeister Rothmann. In 1667 he burned 25 witches. The fine house of the hangman in Neuestrasse was inscribed with some pious motto. He had made a fat living killing witches. I could not help feeling that this place was somehow symbolic of the New Germany, with its sentimentality, its folklore versions of history, its dark hatred of anything which questioned its cloying dreams of hearth and home.

Bastable drove the car under an archway, through a double door and into a garage. Someone had been waiting and the doors were immediately closed. An oil-lamp was turned up. Herr El stood there, smiling with relief. He moved to embrace me, but I begged him not to. The energy I seemed to have derived from the sword was still with me, but my bones remained broken and bruised.

We crossed a small area and entered another old door. The roofs of the rooms were so low I had to bend to get through the doors. But the place was comfortable and there was a relaxing air to it, as if some protective spell had been cast around it. Herr El asked if he could examine me. I agreed and we went into a small room next to the kitchen. It seemed to be set up as a surgery. Perhaps Herr El was the doctor to The White Rose. As he examined me, he commented on the expert nature of the beatings. "Those fellows know what to do. They can keep a fit man going for a long time, I'd imagine. You, yourself, Count von Bek, were in surprisingly good condition. All that exercise with your sword seems to have paid dividends. I'd guess you'll heal in no time. But the men who did this were scientists!"

"Well," I said grimly, "they're passing their knowledge on to their fellow scientists in Hell now."

Herr El let out a long sigh. He dressed my wounds and bandaged me himself. He had clearly had medical training. "You'll have to do your best with this. Ideally, you should rest, but there'll be little time for that after today. Do you know what's happening?"

"I understand that I'm being taken to a place of safety via some secret underground route," I said.

His smile was thin. "With luck," he said. He asked me to tell me all that I could remember. When I remarked how I had become possessed, how some hellish self had taken me over, he put a sympathetic hand on my arm. But he could not or would not reveal the mystery of it.

He gave me something to help me sleep. As far as I knew that sleep was dreamless and uninterrupted until I felt the young woman shaking me gently and heard her calling me to get up and have something to eat. There was a certain urgency in her voice which made me immediately alert. A quick shower, some ham and hard-boiled eggs, a bit of decent bread and butter, which reminded me suddenly how good ordinary food could be, and I was hurrying back to the garage where Bastable waited in the driving seat, the young woman beside him. She now carried her arrows in a basket and her bow had become a kind of staff. She had aged herself by about 50 years. Bastable wore his SS-style uniform and I was back in my country clothes, with a hat hiding my white hair and smoked glasses hiding my red eyes.

The young woman turned to me as I climbed into the Duesenberg. "We can deceive almost anyone but von Minct and Klosterheim. They suspect who we really are and do not underestimate us. Gaynor, as you call him, has a remarkable instinct. How he found us so quickly is impossible to understand, but his own car has already passed through Kassel and it's touch and go who'll reach our ultimate destination first." I asked her where that was. She named another picturesque town which possessed an authentic legend. "The town of Hameln, only a few miles from here. It's reached by an atrocious road."

Some might almost call it the most famous town in Germany. It was known throughout the world for its association with rats, children and a harlequin piper.

Again we drove frequently without lights, doing everything we could to make sure that the car was not recognized. A less sturdy machine would have given up long since, but the American car was one of the best ever produced. The thump of its engine, as it cruised at almost 50 miles an hour, was like the steady, even beat of a gigantic heart.

Crag and forests fled by in the moonlight. Monasteries and hamlets, churches and farms. Everything that was most enduring and individual about Germany. Yet this history, this folklore and mythology, was exactly what the Nazis had co-opted for themselves, identifying it with all that was least noble about Germans and Germany. A nation's real health can be measured, I sometimes think, by the degree in which it sentimentalizes experience. Sentimentality so easily disguises sadism, greed and rapacity. The more a man talks of home, mother, hearth and children, the more he refers to them in his public life, the more he is to be distrusted.

And then at last we saw the Weser, a long dark scar of water in the distance, and on its banks the town of Hameln, with her solid old buildings of stone and timber and her "rat-catcher's house." We had turned a tight corner in the road and without warning encountered our first road block. These were SA. Bastable knew that if we were to be inspected, they would soon realize we were not what we seemed. We had to keep going. So I raised my arm in the Nazi salute as our car slowed, barked out a series of commands, referring to urgent business and escaped traitors while Bastable did his best to look like an SS driver and the confused stormtroopers let us pass. I hoped they were not in regular communication with anyone else on our route.

There was no way of bypassing Hameln and I even doubted that an old bridge could take as large a car as ours across the Wesser, but we had no choice. Bastable slowed his speed, put on his cap and became stately. I was an honoured civilian, perhaps with his mother. We got down to the ferry without incident but it was obvious that nothing could take the weight of our car. Bastable drove the machine back to the nearest point to the bridge and led us over on foot. We had no weapons apart from the woman's bow and the black sword I held on my shoulder as I limped in the rear.

We crossed the bridge and soon Bastable was leading

us along a footpath barely visible in the misty moonshine. I caught glimpses of the river, of the lights of Hameln, clumps of tall trees, banks of forest. Perhaps the distant headlamps of cars. We seemed to be pursued by a small army. Bastable had increased his pace and I was finding it difficult to keep up. He knew exactly where he was going, but he was becoming increasingly anxious.

From somewhere we heard the roar of motor engines, the scream of klaxons, and we knew that Gaynor and Klosterheim had anticipated our destination. Was there a route by road to where Bastable led us? Or would they have to follow us on foot? I panted some of these questions to Bastable.

He replied evenly. "They'll have split into two parties, is my guess. One coming from Hildesheim and the other from Detmold. They won't have our trouble with the river. But the roads are pretty bad and I don't know how good their cars are. We're almost at the gorge now. We can just pray they haven't anticipated us. But Gaynor really can't be underestimated."

"You know him?"

"Not here," was Bastable's peculiar reply.

Then we were stumbling into a narrow gorge which appeared to have a dead end. I'd become suspicious. I thought for a moment that Bastable had brought us into a trap, but he cautioned us to silence, and led us slowly along the side of the canyon, keeping to the blackest shadows. We had almost reached the sheer slab of granite which closed us in when from above and to the sides voices suddenly sounded. There was some confusion. Headlamps came on and went out again. A badly prepared trap.

"The sword!" Bastable shouted to me, flinging his body against the rock as the beams of flashlights sought us out. "Von Bek. You must strike with the sword."

I didn't know what he meant.

"Strike what?"

"This, man. This wall. This rock!"

We again heard the roar of engines. Suddenly powerful headlamps carved through the darkness. I heard Gaynor's voice, urging the car forward. But the driver was having difficulty. There was an appalling scraping of gears, whining and coughing as the car rolled forward.

"Give yourselves up!" This was Klosterheim from above, shouting through a loud hailer. "You have no way of escape!"

"The sword!" hissed Bastable. The young woman put her quiver over her shoulder and strung her oddly carved bow.

Did he expect me to chop my way through solid granite? The man was mad. Maybe they were all mad and my own disorientation had allowed me to believe they were my saviours?

"Strike at the rock," said the young woman. "It must be done. It is all that will save us."

I simply could not summon enough belief, yet dutifully I tried to lift the great sword over my shoulders. There was a moment when I was sure I would fail and then, again, my doppelgänger stood before me. Indistinct and in some evident pain, he signed to me to follow him. And

then he stepped into the rock and vanished.

I screamed and with all my strength brought the great black battle-blade against the granite wall. There was a strange sound, as if ice cracked, but the wall held. To my astonishment, so did the sword. It seemed unmarked.

From somewhere behind me a machine gun rattled.

I swung the blade again. And again it struck the rock.

This time there was a deep, groaning snap from within the depths of the granite and a thin crack appeared down the length of the slab. I staggered back. If the sword had not been so perfectly balanced I could not have swung it for a third time. But swing it I did –

And suddenly the sword was singing – somehow the vibrating metal connected with the vibrating rock and produced an astonishing harmony. It bit deep into my being, swelling louder and louder until I could hear nothing else. I tried to raise the sword for a fourth time but failed –

And then the great slab parted. It split like a plank, with a sharp crunching noise, and something cold and ancient poured out of the fissure, engulfing us. Bastable was panting. The young woman had paused to send several arrows back into the Nazi ranks, but it was impossible to see if she had hit anyone. Bastable stumbled forward and we followed, into a gigantic cave whose floor, at the entrance, was as smooth as marble. We heard echoes. Sounds like human voices. Distant bells. The cry of a cat.

And I was terrified.

It was as if I actually stood at Hell's gates. I knew that if somehow that wall of rock closed behind me, just as it had in the Hamlyn legend, I would be buried alive, cut off forever from all I had loved or valued. The enormity of what had happened – that I had somehow created a resonance with the blade which had cracked open solid rock to reveal a cave – supported a bizarre legend which everyone knew had grown out of the 13th century and the Children's Crusade. I think I was close to losing consciousness. Then I felt the young woman at my elbow and I was staggering forward, every bruise giving me almost unbearable pain. Into the darkness.

Bastable had plunged on and was already lost from sight. I called out to him and he replied. "We must get into the stalagmite forest. Hurry, man. That wall won't close for a while and Gaynor has the courage to follow us!"

And then there was a great shriek and everything was blazing white light as Gaynor's car actually reached the entrance of the cave and drove inside. He was like a mad huntsman in pursuit of his prey. The car was a living steed. No obstacle, no consideration was important as long as he held on to our trail.

I heard guns sound again and overhead in the roof something began to ring like bells, then tinkle like glass. A heavy weight came whistling down out of the darkness and smashed a short distance from me. Fragments powdered my body.

The shots were disturbing the rock formations typical of such caves. In the light from Gaynor's car I looked upwards. Something black flew across my field of vision. I saw that Bastable and the young archer were also watching the ceiling, just as concerned for what the gunfire might dislodge.

Another spear of rock came swiftly downwards and bits of it struck my face and hands. I looked up again, lost my footing and suddenly was sliding downwards on what appeared to be a rattling slope of loose shale.

Above me I heard Bastable yelling. "Hang on to the sword, Count Ulric!" I did my best to stop my slide and hold on to the *Ravenbrand* at the same time. I was not about to let go of that sword. It felt as if we had become one creature. Man and sword, we existed in some unholy union, each dependent upon the other. I thought that if one were destroyed the other would immediately cease to exist.

A prospect which seemed increasingly likely as the slope became steeper and steeper and my speed became a sickening fall, down and down into impossible depths.



**Michael Moorcock** is currently writing a new fantasy novel, to be called *The Dreamthief's Daughter*. The above piece is edited from the opening chapters of that work-in-progress, which is likely to see publication in its finished form in 2001.

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**All it takes is a little imagination!**



There's something to be said, she thought, for spending money on old-fashioned furniture. Most of this modern stuff's rubbish. Just look at the joints. Dove-tailing's a forgotten art. All wire staples and hardboard. And the price! She'd had her table since she and Mo got married. Just like her mum's. *That oak's hard as iron.* Vi Corren smiled.

She'd be dead now if it wasn't for good furniture. When this bomb went off, her table had somehow been lifted across her chair, protecting her from the collapsing walls. It was pitch dark, so she knew there'd be a lot on top of her. But she didn't think she was in any immediate danger. And her chair was solid as a rock.

The suite was in perfect condition when she bought it at MacMurtry's. Hardly used. It cost a fraction of that spindly modern stuff. Okay for a coffee bar, but you wouldn't want it in your home.

MacMurtry's furniture was *better* than new. Made by real craftsman, like her dad. Sound as a bell. Good prices. Of course, she had everything thoroughly cleaned.

Give me what you want to spend, she'd tell Mo. And then let me go and find what I want. He'd been glad of her savings when his back went out that time.

Over the years most of her furniture came from MacMurtry's. That lovely sideboard, her cabinets. Mick MacMurtry had a big shop on the corner of Old Sweden Street. When his lease ran out they knocked the whole block down and erected some sort of insurance building. She couldn't get on with all these new featureless skyscrapers.

Her dad had been a joiner and worked for Heals. Mo's dad had been a Princelet Street tailor. "You tell me about three-piece *suits*," she'd say, "and I'll tell you about three-piece *suites*."

He'd always liked her humour. He was a couple of years younger. The only kid she had, she told people affectionately. He'd be retiring soon and she'd be glad of it. He wanted a clean break from Brookgate. He'd set his heart on Tudor Hamlets. There wouldn't be any argument from her now. She'd love a little garden.

The big armchair moved under her like a living monster. *Oh!*

Huge stones groaning in the darkness overhead.

Then a terrible stillness.

Dust fell. Something squeaked and scraped and juddered, but the table held.

"No time for panic, Vi."

She breathed slowly and easily, the way she did at the dentist. She refused to think of all the rubble that had to be on top of her.

Another noise. Not a shot. Guns made a simultaneous *crack, thud, bang*. This was like something snapping.

"Calm down, Vi."

Most of her childhood Brookgate was already gone. Buried under glassy concrete. Streets you didn't recog-

# Furniture

*Michael Moorcock*

nise. People you didn't know. No proper shops. Really it would be a relief to move. Their insurance would easily cover them, though finding the furniture would be a problem. Everything decent was an antique, these days. Those old parlour drawleaves, still with their wartime util-

ity marks, were selling to Americans for hundreds.

All their married life Mo had complained about her taste. Being a cabby, he picked up the latest trends. She'd bowed to him on decorations but she'd been firm about the furniture.

*A second-hand table saved my life in 1945.* They'd had an indoor shelter – steel sheeting and wire screens around your ordinary table. She felt so safe sleeping under it. Then the V2 hit Bacon Street. Mum at the pictures. Dad catching a few hours upstairs. The ARP dug her out. Bruised, stiff and wheezing, but unhurt. Just this permanent allergy to dust. She could feel her skin coming up now. *The Mirror* had called her The Miracle Girl. There'd been quite a few miracles in 1945.

She loved to see the sun come up over St Paul's. If she had a wish it would be to enjoy one more London sunrise without all these new buildings in the way.

Mo had insisted on buying their flat. He'd seen ahead. You could ask any price you liked for a ground floor since the boom. Business people wanting somewhere near the City. Not much of the flat left now! Just the table, the chair and her. The basics.

She was surprised by her own spontaneous laughter. She was almost relieved. She spoke aloud, into the settling dust.

"I could do with a cup of tea."

Still, then she'd need to go to the toilet. So it was probably for the best. She wondered what the time was. She'd find out soon from the wireless. When she knew they were searching for her, she'd turned it off to save the battery. These new headphones were so good she hadn't heard the loudspeakers outside. What a fool! Everyone safe but her. Even the cat. People thought she'd left in the first evacuation. Mistaken her for the other Mrs Corren. Ticked her off the residents' list. The other Mrs Corren wouldn't have said anything.

They'd double-checked. But even if you stuck your head round the door you couldn't see a person sitting in this big chair. So while everybody else responded to the bomb warning, she'd been in a world of her own, looking out of her window at the grey drizzle, the slow, reflective concrete, listening to her tape. *Velià, O, Velià, the witch of the wood*. Looking forward to Mo bringing in their usual Friday fish and chips.

According to the news, it had been a huge explosion centred on the bank next door. As warned, it had gone off at exactly eight p.m. She must have blacked out when it happened.

Terrible devastation. All the surrounding office blocks affected. The wireless had said Mo was on his way home

when he heard the news. He usually rang her on his mobile. A real worrier, Mo. She felt so sorry for him. He hadn't had her happy childhood.

Her mum had just been glad she was alive. Aunties all over the place. So much space. So much freedom. Ruins to play in. A vast adventure playground. And something more: That rediscovery of a wise, safe, dreaming, dignified, permanent London only made visible again by Hitler's bombs.

A high price to pay, though.

She remembered when she'd run barefoot over grass, through the rosebay willowherb and dandelions and cow parsley down to St Paul's. Good old St Paul's. Thanks to the bombs you had a clear view across the city. Ludgate Circus. The Old Bailey. The way it had been centuries ago. The Tower. The Mint. Not much in the way of tourists, then. She'd known so many people. She'd loved it, running everywhere she wanted to go, cycling over footpaths trodden down to Smithfield, the river, the Customs House, Billingsgate. Wild flowers blooming. All the markets doing noisy business. In the evening, when the office workers had gone to their stations, you could sit on a ruined roof and watch the sun set over great stretches of river. Timeless security in the heart of the city.

As a girl she'd volunteered for the hardest paper round just so she could get up before dawn and stand on a pile of weed-grown rubble to watch the sun rise over St Paul's. You couldn't do that any more, now that they'd built those big, brutal barbicans.

What kind of happy childhood was it, she wondered, which made you so nostalgic for ruins? Ruins were all she'd really known. And there were so few records of them. Lots of pictures of Brookgate before the war, when all the old buildings were still standing. Lots of stuff afterwards, with the big cranes and the permanent scaffolding. By then she was working at the old cigarette factory and the big changes all went on behind hoardings. Then they closed the factory and turned it into executive offices. She got a job at Mullards, Clerkenwell, until that went, too, under that computer tower.

Her childhood had been wonderful. They never really left London. After staying in Wales for a week, they'd all come home. Mum said she'd rather die of an air-raid than die of boredom. The peace and quiet got on your nerves. Made you think about things too much. Better to be in it and doing something than out of it and worrying all the time. She'd wanted to be near dad.

Vi's hands were numb. She wished she could get up and move around. She turned on the wireless.

Radio Five. Some chat about sports then, abruptly, the news. It was five in the morning. Rescue workers still had hopes of finding her alive. A real drama.

Her chair shook and the table overhead, scraped a bit lower. She could feel its pressure on her left shoulder. Like the weight of the earth.

A long moment. It seemed like an hour.

Something fell towards her and seemed to land at her feet. There was a rushing sound, a human yell. Then a surprising gap in the darkness. Lights. Dogs barking. Distant

voices. She drew a deep breath of the cool air and shouted. "Here. I'm here." Her voice was too hoarse. "Here!"

Exclamations. More scrabbling. The sound of a motor. Urgent tones. Instructions. Something moved. The table shifted again, but this time the pressure eased.

The patch of pale grey widened. It was the outside. Shadows. Torch beams. Something flashed in her eyes.

"Are you okay, love?"

"Well, I could do with a cup of tea."

"We're just bracing all this rubbish up so we can get you out properly." The face in the torchlight was heavily bearded, wearing a turban. Was it Doctor Singh?

He smiled. "And I'll tell Tom to put the kettle on."

Suddenly she was freezing. The morning air. She was only wearing a pair of light slacks and a cotton sweater.

Another squeak and the table was off her shoulder altogether. The bearded man was crawling carefully towards her. "We're going to make it. We're going to make it, love." He seemed to be reassuring himself. She wasn't worried at all. She had faith in her furniture.

But when he reached her she almost cried, gripping his lovely warm hand.

"Now we're both under the table," she said. He smiled, checking this, feeling that.

"Nothing wrong with me, doc."

"Amazing."

He murmured rapidly and calmly into his mobile phone.

"We shan't have any trouble getting you clear. The explosion blew most of the heavy stuff away from you. This table formed a sort of shelter. You're a lucky woman, Mrs Corren."

"Oh, I know that, dear," she said. "This isn't the first time I've been stuck in a bit of rubble. Could you ring my husband and tell him I'm all right?"

"He knows by now, love, don't worry. He's out there waiting."

"It's done terrible damage, hasn't it?"

He was bleak. "You wouldn't recognise anything. All in ruins. Your chances were a million to one. Like winning the lottery."

The big steel arms were dragging the concrete back, as if a curtain lifted. Dawn light. Dawn breezes on her face. It was like being born.

"Oh!"

Suddenly she could see her rescuers, the sky, the broken landscape, the vast, shallow crater, the rubble beyond.

The light revealed more and more. Through a smoky haze she could see all the way to St Paul's.

"It's a miracle," he said. "A genuine miracle."

She watched as the sun began to rise, a radiant harmony of pale golds and reds, behind the cathedral's glittering dome.

"Yes," she said. "You can always rely on good furniture."

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**Michael Moorcock**, who resides in Texas but has long memories of London, wrote the above non-fantasy story for BBC Radio, and it was broadcast (in slightly different form) in 1999. We are pleased to present it in print for the first time.

## U.S. AIDED BUTCHERS OF TIMOR

*The Observer*

Gatwick Airport, London: why did they say that?

Gatwick wasn't London, it was Sussex. Things had been bad enough in the days when Imperial Airways flew out of Croydon; even that was too far south of the river.

He supposed he shouldn't have given his Daewoo executive jet to Colonel Gadaffi for Rosh Hashanah, but he couldn't fly around the globe in a plane with a name like that. Executive. As if he was some kind of corporate administrator.

If he'd still had the Daewoo, he could have landed in Officeland then taken the magne-tram into the West End. But from Gatwick, he had to go by train. He loved public transport. If only the public weren't allowed, it would have been perfect. They didn't own the railways any more, so why should they have access to the trains?

He'd owned his own railway company long before privatization, before nationalization in fact, and he used to travel in a Pullman carriage specially renovated by Libertys, coupled to his 1869 Central Pacific 4-4-0 Jupiter locomotive. These days, he preferred to be less conspicuous.

He ignored the Gatwick Express because there would be too many foreigners on board, and they simply didn't know how to behave in England. Connex South East was owned by the French, but at least the crew was British. When the first train arrived, he tapped on the driver's window and showed him a small, transparent plastic bag.

Printed on the bag it said:

### NO MIXED COINS

£20 IN £2 POUND COIN

£20 IN £1 POUND COIN

£10 IN 50p OR 20p

£5 IN 10p OR 5p

£1 IN 2p OR 1p

There were no mixed coins. They were all gold. Tsar Leon roubles.

The driver asked the people in the first section of the train to move further back, which they obediently did, and then he disconnected the other carriages.

The train and its single passenger headed north for London, London.

## STRESS THERAPY ON N.H.S. FOR I.R.A. KILLERS

*The Mail on Sunday*

"A pot of tea, please," he said.

"This is a coffee shop, sir," said the young man behind the counter of the Terminal Café. "We only sell coffee."

The café used to sell all-day breakfasts, meaning it sold breakfast all day; but you could also stay there all day, lingering over sausage and eggs, or beans on toast, or just more and more tea. Now there wasn't even tea. It took too long to brew. No food, because even fast food was too slow.

"Then I'll have a coffee," he said.

"What kind, sir?"

"Black, no sugar."

"Yes, sir, but what kind of coffee?"

He gazed up at the menu on the wall. No one went into a coffee house and ordered "coffee," not these days. It was like going into a bookshop and asking for "a book."

There were scores of coffees listed, each with a variety of roasts and different blends, some from countries which he'd never even heard of, let alone visited.

Wherever he travelled, he always liked to try the local blend – once, at least.

"Instant," he said.

"Sir?" The young man frowned.

He would have to be more specific, and so he said, "Maxwell House."

## MY YO-YO SEX WITH GULLIT & GAZZA

*Sunday People*

"I used to think that London was the centre of the universe," said Paul, "and I couldn't wait to move here. I was fascinated by those old black-and-white films, the London of Sherlock Holmes and Charles Dickens. I remember reading that in the last century, one out of every three houses in London was a brothel – and the second one was a pub. I used to wonder what the third one could be. It had to be some kind of vice, something so depraved and corrupt that it couldn't be named. Maybe it was to do with drugs, subterranean opium dens where mindless addicts paid a few pence for their sordid dreams. Or maybe it was at the other end of the spectrum, something for the elite of London society. I'd no idea what, but like a high-class casino where all the men wore evening dress."

"And?" he asked.

"The answer was obvious," said Paul, "and a big disappointment when I realized. Every third house in London was



just that – a house, where people lived.”

“And now every third building in London is a bank,” he said. “But not the kind you can get cash out of.”

They were in Paul’s apartment. He owned the whole of the top three floors, and the penthouse had no walls, just windows. The panoramic view of the city was spectacular, like an updated version of a medieval map. The Thames was almost directly below, and the old dock in the bend of the river had been converted into a fabulous marina. Paul claimed that the apartment belonged to the bank, making it sound as though he had a mortgage on the place. It was true that the bank owned the entire building and also the freehold of the land on which it stood – but Paul owned the bank.

“Money makes the world go around,” said Paul.

“All your money ever does is go around and around the world,” he said, “chasing fluctuations in currency rates.”

Foreign exchange markets had developed so that businesses in different countries could be paid for selling goods and services to each other; but money had itself become a commodity, now making up 95% of what was traded on the currency exchanges every day.

“Profit is the reward for venture capital, for investment, for risk,” said Paul – who had never risked his own stash of cash. Originally, that was because he didn’t have any. He was always skint, always borrowing, always promising to repay when his expected postal order arrived. That was how he’d made his fortune, from other people’s money.

“You still owe me a fiver,” he said.

That was the fiver which started Paul on his career in financial services, back in the days when five pounds was real money – a hundred shillings. He’d liked the eccentricity of the currency system, and in a way he regretted having imposed decimalization on a reluctant country. As compensation, he had allowed metrication to be introduced slowly and randomly.

Paul patted the pockets of his immaculate dinner-jacket, as if looking for his wallet. He frowned.

“Can I pay you next time?” he said.

By which he meant: at the end of time.

## **SPEED LIMIT WILL BE CUT TO 50 M.P.H.**

*The Sunday Times*

He’d always hated English Sundays. Everything was closed. There was nowhere to go except to church, and there was nothing to do except read the newspapers. Then one Sunday, having read all the news in all the papers, he’d decided to have the trading laws changed.

Now that Sundays offered more alternatives, there was less time to read the newspapers; paradoxically, the Sunday papers were the heaviest of the week – but only in the physical sense, of course.

Shopping had become the national pastime, with family motoring expeditions to out-of-town “retail parks”; and “price wars” or plans to build a new supermarket and “create” new jobs were treated as major news stories. Once, the majority of people were needed to produce goods, they were workers; now, their task was to buy things, their main economic function was as consumers.

## **C.N.D. CHIEF WAS STASI SECRET AGENT**

*The Sunday Telegraph*

He stood in the newsagent’s, staring at all the computer journals, and he said, “This is the electronic age, right? They used to talk about the paperless office. But look at all these computer magazines. Everything in there must be available on disk, or the internet, so why don’t people read it on-screen?”

“That’s the great paradox of the information age,” said George. “The best way of transmitting and absorbing information is through ink on paper. I’m glad it is. It’s my core business.”

“You still do any writing?” he asked.

“There’s no need,” George answered. “I’m still a communist, but the revolution is over and I won. The means of production and distribution are now in my hands.” He looked at his hands, then strummed on an imaginary guitar. “I’ve started playing again, just for fun. And before you ask: no, I’m not planing to re-form the band.” He laughed.

“What about The Novel?”

“It’s finished,” said George.

“Is it?”

“Yeah.” George tapped his forehead. “All I have to do is write it down!” He laughed again, then mimed typing on a keyboard.

George had been a hack of all trades. He’d written countless magazine articles: holiday features, household hints, quizzes, film reviews, advice on pets, showbiz gossip, horoscopes, gardening tips, motoring columns, sports summaries. When he reached the stage where he had more commissions than he could handle, he was forced to turn down work.

“You should do what any tradesman would do, George,” he’d advised. “If a plumber or electrician gets too busy, they hire a mate. They might even take on a trainee, give them an apprenticeship.”

George had employed a girl straight from secretarial school, and she turned out articles on fashion, make-up, sewing, cookery, weddings, babies. As the business expanded, he took on more staff, and before long he’d established a writing factory and was providing the complete contents for numerous weeklies and monthlies. Then George moved into publishing, starting his own magazines and controlling the entire process of production.

“It’s all done abroad now?” he asked.

“Afraid so,” said George. “Word for word, in terms of price and quality, the writers over here just can’t compete. Most of the work is done by teenage girls in Taiwan, Korea and Malaysia. They’re fast, accurate, and their English grammar is a lot better than you find in this country. I use two or three editors over here. They do the spell-checks and punctuation. Call me old-fashioned, but I think those details are important.”

“Yes,” he agreed, as he considered the nature of the apostrophe.

## **HUSHED-UP RESEARCH FINDS POISONS IN FISH FINGERS**

*The Independent on Sunday*

It had been the best fish-and-chip shop in London, the

third best in the whole south-east. Now it was gone, turned into a pizza house.

Filleting fish took skill and patience, and at one time he'd thought the Chinese were going to take over the entire trade. They ran a lot of chip shops, and had begun infiltrating their own dishes onto the menu.

Then he noticed something else was happening to Britain's greatest contribution to international gastronomy. In the north of England, chip shops sold "fish" – which meant cod. Fish, chips and mushy peas. Proper mushy peas could only be bought north of Birmingham. Relatively quickly, a new item had been added to almost every cuisine. Curry sauce.

And now curry was the British national dish. Or so it was claimed. Like most things in the media, it wasn't true. There were over 8,000 fish-and-chip shops in the UK; between them, they sold four times as many meals as all the Indian take-aways.

As far as he was concerned, things had changed for the worse when fish and chips no longer came wrapped in newspaper. Fresh food and old news, something to read for no extra charge. Straight out of the paper, fish and chips could be eaten walking along the street or even while driving. You couldn't do that with chicken madras or sweet and sour pork.

But you could with Britain's other main culinary import, the burger. What else did it have in its favour? In production line catering, taste and nutritional value were never part of the equation. What a burger offered was consistency. It was always the same, always safe.

That was the way the whole world was going. Becoming bland and safe, without even the threat of a rogue fish bone that might lie in ambush within the crispy batter of a succulent mouthful of plaice or huss.

At least bovine spongiform encephalopathy and the risk of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease had brought the fun back into eating beefburgers.

## IT'S GERI HALLIWELL NAKED AND TOPLESS

*Sunday Sport*

"A bottle of –" He paused, remembering that the Terminal Café, no longer sold tea. Perhaps this place no longer sold alcohol. It used to be a pub, now it was known as a bar; it also had a different name.

"– Von Bek's," he said.

The barman removed the metal cap and gave him a bottle. It was ice cold. Ordering "a bottle" once meant having it poured into a glass.

"And a glass, please," he said.

"Not drinking Guinness?" said voice from behind him.

He always used to order a bottle of Guinness; it was the one drink you could buy in every pub in the country.

"Hello, Pete," he answered, not looking around.

"That's on the house," Pete told the barman. "Give me a bottle of Isis."

"Selling water, Pete, that has to be your best scam yet. Even better than lager."

"Cheers." Pete sipped at his small bottle. "Yeah, so good that the Tories stole it." He smiled. "Let's go where it's

quiet." He led the way up the stairs, through a door, and out onto a balcony above the crowd. Watching the drinkers below, he continued, "I feel a bit guilty about the whole lager thing, don't you?"

"Should I?"

His original reason for drinking bottled Guinness was because draught bitter was so unpredictable, too often flat or sour or cloudy. He didn't mind taking a calculated risk now and then; but if he wanted to gamble every time he went into a pub, he'd have played the fruit machines. Skill and patience were needed to prepare a barrel, and there weren't enough Chinese landlords.

Pete's initial ventures with top-pressure keg beer had been moderately successful, but it was "lager" which had launched his empire.

"There's a whole generation that equates drinking pints with belching and farting," said Pete. "Maybe I should start a chain of ale houses." He glanced up at the ceiling. "Dim lights." He glanced down at the ground. "Sawdust on the floor."

"You must have plenty of wood from all the places you gutted." He knew that Pete never threw anything away; kept long enough, everything had a value. "You can recycle it as sawdust."

"Very environmental." Pete drummed his fingers on the balustrade, then noticed what he was doing. "Old habits." He shrugged. "How's this as a slogan? 'Save the ozone layer – drink real ale.'" He laughed and took a swig of his water.

"Why did you change the name? The *Dick Turpin*. That had class, it had history."

"This is the classless society."

"You're telling me." He gazed around the pub, or what had been a pub, but his eyes took in the rest of London, the whole country.

"This has class," said Pete, also looking down, although not as far. "'Dick Turpin' means nothing to the punters here. They think he's a pantomime figure, someone who was mayor of London three times. So I abbreviated it to *Turpin's*. The logo design is really stylish. We couldn't use the word 'dick', not these days. It's far too macho, too sexist."

Over in the corner, the stripper threw off the last of her clothes and danced naked on the table. People moved closer, there was pushing, shoving, shouting, and a fight broke out.

"Sometimes," said Pete, "it's total chaos."

## SPIES AT THE PALACE

*Sunday Mirror*

A hundred years ago, London was the largest city in the world. Now, it didn't even make the top ten. It was on its way down, unlikely to climb the charts again.

The heart of London was small and the best way to travel around the city was on foot. When he reached St James's Park, he coded the scanlock and the portcullis opened for him. James the First had wanted to keep crocodiles here. Four centuries later, it was a gorilla sanctuary. Over the Mall, there were rhinos in Green Park. Another endangered species lived in the big house in Buckingham Palace Gardens.

## SOCCER STARS DODGE MILLIONS IN TAX

*The Sunday Express*

"It's much better seeing a game like this, don't you think?" said Gerry. "It's live, you get all the atmosphere."

The atmosphere was air-conditioned, the huge window was soundproofed to keep out the noise of the crowd. If Gerry wanted to hear what was happening outside his private box, he had to turn up the volume on the television. The TV screen was almost as big as the window, and it gave a much better picture of what was happening on the pitch below: close-ups and slow-motion replays. Not that it mattered. Gerry wasn't paying much attention to the game, either outside or on-screen.

"I thought you hated football," he said.

"Soccer," said Gerry, "that's the name of the game. It comes from 'association football', did you know that?"

He nodded. It was just another useless piece of information taking up space in his brain.

"I never liked soccer when I was a kid," Gerry continued. "You know the old spelling for 'jail' – G-A-O-L? I used to think it was G-O-A-L. And when I played soccer at school, they always put me in goal, which I thought was a punishment."

"Schooldays," he said. "The happiest days of your life."

"Apart from all the rest," said Gerry. "Leaving school was like being released from jail." He shuddered. "But I enjoy watching soccer now." His back was to the window, and he was studying an array of numbers on his datadek. "Okay, okay, I enjoy having my own sporting club. Merchandising, television rights, sponsorship, franchising. It keeps the wolf from the door. You want something to drink?"

"No thanks."

"Something to smoke, something to snort, something to inject?"

"The rewards of fighting the drug wars?" he asked.

"Winning the drug wars," said Gerry, and he smiled. He had made his fortune from the most ruthless drug warlords in the world – the pharmaceutical companies.

He was behind the original programme to locate, catalogue and patent every plant on the globe – every tree, every herb, every flower, every seed – which might have medicinal or nutritional or cosmetic value. Teams of botanical mercenaries scoured the planet to record all the natural extracts and tinctures and potions used by the local inhabitants. Once they were analyzed and registered, they became the legal property of the company which had trade-marked them.

"So much knowledge has already been lost for ever," said Gerry. "How many valuable plants no longer exist because of logging in South-East Asia or jungle clearance in West Africa? But we've saved a lot, too. Doesn't that make you feel good? It does me."

He remembered his casual remark about a "hidden" tribe of Brazilian Indians who now had to buy aspirin, when once they had picked their own medicines for free.

"Who knows what unknown medical riches are within our reach?" said Gerry. "Tomorrow we could find a cure for..." He shrugged, trying to think of the worst disease ever known to humanity.

"...capitalism?"

## RAT HEWITT, 3-IN-A-BED AND A RABBIT FUR GLOVE

*News of the World*

The universe was governed by the laws of physics and mathematics. Biology and chemistry were the basis for understanding existence and evolution. Or so it was claimed – by physicists and mathematicians, biologists and chemists.

But he'd never believed any of that. The only key was words. Words made sense of the world.

The sum total of a person is memory, and he remembered all of his lives.

He remembered being very young, surrounded by people making strange noises. The noises were words, and each word was the deoxyribonucleic acid of communication. Although everyone else recognized what was being said, he was excluded. Crying was his only conversational skill.

Soon, he learned to understand words; soon after, he learned to speak. He became part of the world.

Then came reading and writing. He wasn't merely a part of the world, he was its master. Words gave him access to the secrets of the universe.

Without words, there could be no reason. With words, thoughts could be formed, ideas exchanged, the entire network of history changed. They had to be the right words, of course, and preferably in the right order – because there was nothing which made less sense than a random conjunction of bizarre words, none of which had any connection with those which preceded or followed.

When he was young the world around him had seemed totally incomprehensible, but he'd known that one day everything would be explained. Finding the hidden pattern would be like discovering the secret of words, except it would inevitably take much longer.

The years passed, and he began to realize how certain pieces of the world connected with various others. As more and more of these fitted together, they started to reveal the outline of the complete picture. When he found the last piece of mosaic, every experience would finally coalesce and reveal his destiny.

But as more years went by, the illusion of rational purpose had slowly dissolved. Most events were far beyond all reason. Fate had no ultimate mission for him. By now, he was convinced there was absolutely no pattern in his lives and that the entire universe was totally devoid of meaning or significance.

And if ever the world did seem to make sense, all he had to do was imagine a random conjunction of bizarre words, and then he could reassure himself that it wouldn't last.

**All front page headlines: 19/9/1999**

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**David Garnett** was the editor, with Mike Moorcock leaning over his shoulder, of five fat issues of *New Worlds* in paperback anthology form (four from Gollancz in the UK, and one from White Wolf in the USA). Earlier he edited the *Zenith* sf anthology series. His previous stories here include "Off the Track" (issue 63), "A Friend Indeed" (issue 89) and "Brute Skill" (issue 93). His latest novel, *Bikini Planet* (!), is forthcoming from Orbit Books in February 2000.



Fictionmags@onelist.com is an internet mailing list which was set up in May 1999 by the editor of Interzone. Its purpose is to provide a forum for discussing the history of fiction magazines, past and present (and not just within the science-fiction and fantasy fields). Its membership is fairly small, and consists for the most part of editors, bibliographers, librarians and writers. For a memorable week or so in mid-May 1999, Mike Moorcock was a very active member of Fictionmags. The following extracts, which we publish here in lieu of an interview, are edited from the more than 35,000 words of messages he sent to the mailing list during that brief period. Mike's interlocutors, whose words are not reproduced below, included Mike Ashley, Ellen Datlow, Paul Di Filippo, Stephen Gallagher, Graeme Hurry, Kim Newman, David Pringle and Andy Sawyer. Thanks to all the participants.

Tuesday, 11 May 1999, 09:13

#### Crime Time and Lilliput

I like *Crime Time* – but whether that's genre any more is moot. I personally think we may be going beyond genre as such – noir, horror, mystery, literary – into a genuinely reinvigorating new combination of elements. Not actually liking genre once it *is* genre (i.e. I tend to like the pre-generic examples of a form and the sophisticated riffs at the other end, but not much else in between) I enjoy *Crime Time* and much of the kind of fiction it publishes, and sort of assume there are enough readers like me to sustain something like that. I look there the way maybe people used to look in *New Worlds*, to find the odd substantial, idiosyncratic story. Even when I worked on them, regular monthly fiction magazines (whether *Sexton Blake*, *Argosy* or its brief companion *Suspense*) weren't great sellers and were usually allowed to keep going from sentiment. I gather quite a lot of our best-loved fiction magazines had serious periods of bumping along the bottom.

I wonder if anyone shares my liking for *Lilliput*, a genuine mix of talents and ideas, which ran some genuinely off-beat fiction, including, of course, the famous adventures of Engelbrecht, the Surrealist Boxer? Peake, Searle and many others doing the illustrations, lots of wonderful photography (some of it tasteful eroticism for the day) and the best contributors. One issue pulled at random for March 1948 has fiction by Simenon, Patrick Campbell and Maurice Richardson (Engelbrecht), with illustrations by L. S. Lowry, Searle etc., photos by Bill Brandt and Geoffrey Grigson. October of the same year has A. L. (Bert) Lloyd, Constant Lambert, Patrick Campbell, Sylvia

Townsend Warner and more Simenon and Richardson, plus photographic essays (this was the companion to *Picture Post*, remember, which had most of the surviving European photographers working for it at one stage) by Golass and Suschitzky, etc. All for a shilling.

Although I wasn't reading these as they came out, I read them in second-hand copies and know a lot of people a few years older than me who relied on *Lilliput* both for its fiction and its features – the only place you could find imaginative fiction regularly if you weren't interested in the kind of stuff appearing, say, in *Astounding*. To be honest the taste of that fiction was closer to the stuff coming out at more or less the same time in *Startling*, *Planet* and *Thrilling Wonder* – far more romantic and resonant, for me at any rate, than the militaristic fantasies of Heinlein and Co., none of which I was ever able to engage with. Still don't – space ships make me fall asleep. Maybe that's why the only true space story I ever wrote was about people being asleep... Ballard, Arthur Sellings and a few other

# The "Fictionmags" Rants

Michael Moorcock



writers I knew all preferred *Galaxy* because there was very little space fiction in it – Gold being an agoraphobic helped – unless it was the densely populated "space" of Bester or Dick. What I'd love to reproduce, if I ever did a magazine again, was that eclectic stimulating mix of popular intellectualism and high-quality fiction which echoed a lot of the idealism of the day, and indeed the idealism of the BBC, but

did it in a way that I can only describe as casually civilized. I tried to dispense with genre in *New Worlds* and I'd try to do that again. Maybe part of the appeal of *Lilliput* was that it didn't distinguish a good Simenon from a good Nabokov (who was also in there once or twice, as I recall).

Maybe the newspaper supplements do a similar job, these days, but nothing has the personality of a magazine run pretty much entirely according to the tastes of its editors, and you never get that in modern mass-market magazine publishing any more. A lot to be said for a good solid threat to make us all grow up for a few years. There was a distinctly sounder sense of maturity about those post-war years which might have given us fewer choices in clothing styles but a far wider choice of reading and

entertainment. A presumption of an educated (albeit frequently self-educated) audience looking for substantial entertainment and information? I still think there's a lot to be said for expecting the best of an audience.

Tuesday, 11 May 1999, 10:42

#### A PS about Lilliput

The Maurice Richardson stories in the issues I mentioned were actually not Engelbrecht stories. One is a more or less straight boxing story. The other would be interesting, for instance, to readers of Kim Newman – "Unquiet Wedding" is an account of a wedding between Dracula's Daughter and Son of Frankenstein. Other guests include Holmes and Watson, Moriarty (Chairman of the Fiction Fiends' Guild). There were actually 3,000 detectives invited including Rin Tin Tin, Raffles and Philo Vance – also slightly less well remembered people like Clubfoot and my own favourite Dr Nikola. Dracula gets sniffy via the Transylvanian Ambassador when he learns that van Helsing has been invited. Seems poor taste. References to Marsh's *The Beetle*. An ending which includes the Hound of the Baskervilles mauling Rin Tin Tin. "All that huge expanse of cerebral cortex, Professor, and not an idea to save the game? Yes, Watson? Have you something to say?" "Holmes! I've got it. The only way. We must send for an author." All in about 4,000 words.

Tuesday, 11 May 1999, 11:32

#### How to Survive

Of course you could also do it the Savoy/*New Worlds* (indeed White Wolf) way. Which is to fund your magazine from other sources and not expect to make money directly. All you need is a shop, a facility for writing books in three days or a successful game business... To some extent this is what happened, didn't it, with *American Mercury* and *Black Mask*, which was started to fund the *Mercury*? Now we're talking in terms of how you'd sustain a *Black Mask*... Not, I'd guess, by publishing it on the back of *The Nation* or *The New Statesman*... That's probably when it's time to think of doing something else. I'd guess that most subscribers to *Ellery Queen's* and the other surviving crime-fiction magazines are dead (or soon to die) and that most of the subscriptions are just long-term ones that are slowly running out... Demographics have a lot to do with the survival of publications, often long after any fashion has passed. Note how easy and cheap it is to buy, for instance, *Magnets* and *Gems* from the '20s and '30s. They used to be rare and hugely collectable. Now the fans of Harry Wharton and Billy Bunter, etc., are mostly pushing

up the daisies. Suddenly, it's a baffling area of nostalgia and nothing else. Demand and price drop.

Because of my bizarre childhood, I must be one of the last people alive to have collected those magazines, buying one a week, second-hand, in order to follow the serials of 20 or 30 years earlier. But if I was the age I was when I was feeling frustrated about not having a magazine I liked I'd go for *The Edge* or *Territories* without a doubt. But if I was that age now, I'd also not be seen dead in a modern over-comfy chain coffee-&-books shops full of politely murmuring middle-class wankers, or anywhere near the stacks where the nerds graze. I can't think, even now, of anything much more naff or likely to encourage profound feelings of self-disgust than spending my time browsing through *DragonLance* and *Star Wars* titles and all the other cloned analgesics they're trying to insult our intelligence with. I mean, let's face it, when I started reading sf at least it was thought of (with jazz) as hip, even if most of the hipsters had leather-elbowed sports jackets and baggy flannels like Kingsley Amis and tended to drone on a bit about obscure sidesmen and awkward-to-obtain stories from forgotten pulps. Now all we're left with in both cases is the drone.

But the best imaginative fiction still gets published and read, no matter what they choose to call it these days. I remain optimistic about the authors, if not the publishers. One of the things we knew for sure on *New Worlds* was that the act of putting a story – especially a serial – into print actually made publishers want to publish it. Not for any other reason than that someone had already approved of it... We knew if we could get, say, *Bug Jack Barron* into *New Worlds*, it

would almost automatically get a commercial publisher. That was one of our chief functions, as we saw it, and it remains the most important function of a magazine, in my view. Only a small section of any readership is genuinely alert to fresh approaches or demands them.

Most readers of genre fiction (and I include in that category most modern literary fictions) actually demand the mixture as before and act oddly (like thwarted addicts) if you threaten change. I've been involved in too many changes of approach (*Tarzan*, *Sexton Blake*, *New Worlds*) to believe any different. Readers soon get used to changes – but it's the getting-used-to that's the problem... Familiarity is what they're looking for. And, naturally, it takes time for things to become familiar... Animals, including people, really like repetition. If we didn't, we probably wouldn't have music. I suspect that's also what crime TV and movies chiefly provide, if the wheelbarrow-loads of cliché, stereotyping and conventional attitudes are anything to go by. I must admit that while I don't think I've ever watched a *Star Trek* all the way through, I haven't watched an *Inspector Morse* all the way through either. The last crime series I enjoyed was *Big Breadwinner* Hogg, which could be said to have set the tone for most of the other hardboiled Brit thrillers. I'd love to see Steve Aylett's *Beerlight* (*Slaughtermatic*, etc) done for TV, for instance, but until recently you had to find Aylett in fairly obscure places. Same goes for writers like Tim Etchells and Steve Beard, even Stuart Home. Most people don't want the prose to aspire to the same levels of originality as the plots.

However, I do think that the taking up of pulp ideas and styles by modern writers has much in common with the revival that *New Worlds* was able to celebrate. It's vaguely reminiscent of typical nationalist literary movements where the language of the people is celebrated and the literary language of a previous authority is rejected. I think the authority of literary language has collapsed and that people are looking to "pulp" – or popular – idioms for stimulus, something they can use. But since it's taken more than 30 years for some of those *New Worlds* writers to find a reasonable public, I suspect a self-sustaining magazine running sharp, new fiction would find much the same problem. You can't really be "ahead of your time" (i.e. appealing to the same relatively small number of people) and make the kind of money a fashionable lifestyle magazine makes.



Tuesday, 11 May 1999, 11:41

**Payment Rates**

Thirty quid a thousand! You blokes live like kings.

I'm not being sardonic. Carnell used to pay you two pounds ten shillings a thousand if he thought you were good enough (Clarke, Ballard, Aldiss, Brunner) but I never got more than two guineas a thousand... People still apologize to me for their rates – and they always seem pretty handsome to me. Maybe it's because I got so used to paying for the magazine myself. Any payment seems like sheer profit. But there again, I see magazine publication as a form of prepublication – and having an immediacy book publication usually lacks. But I was never once attracted to a magazine because of its rates – only by its policies. *Playboy*, for instance, was the big market in the '60s and, after a brief flurry with them when Judy Merrill was fiction editor for a while, I had no interest in publishing there – because they fucked your story over. At least when Carnell fucked your story over it was usually a simple blunder.

Magazine publication feels like “real” publishing to me – as, for that matter, does being remaindered. Both are the ends of the market I used to inhabit, buying my first Peakes, for instance, as cheap remainders out of a dumpbin and finding that most of the fiction I liked was available pretty cheaply if you were prepared to wait...

Tuesday, 11 May 1999, 13:04

**More on Lilliput – and Picture Post**  
*Lilliput* was as far as I recall part of Odhams, who did *Picture Post*. No relation to its imitator *Men Only*. And, of course, *The Strand* tried to imitate its success towards the end (I have a run of those last digest-size *Strands*). Was *Lilliput* the first large-circulation digest-size magazine (after *Reader's Digest*, presumably)? I think the spell comes from immediacy – a sense that the story's just been written, illustrations just been drawn – and so on. But a lot depends on editors, too, and circulation. You can always tell a magazine that has its act together and is making money! Same with a newspaper. It has to do with the morale and the input of the people working on it, which then gets good feedback from readers, and so it goes on. *Lilliput* had a very loyal core readership, but I suspect it sold as long and as well as it did for the tasteful nudes – people could justify buying it the way they used to justify buying *Playboy* (for the fiction). Some people really did buy both magazines primarily for the fiction, to be fair!

A lot of the atmosphere of a magazine has to do with its art direction, choice of artwork and so on. Also the

sheer madness of producing that amount of words on a regular monthly schedule and having to keep it seasonal (Christmas for a magazine editor always comes around August) and reasonably topical gives a life to a magazine. A daily newspaper's even better. I started on weeklies, which is why I always believed you had less than a week to write anything, including novels, in and I still enjoy serial writing – thinking on your feet. After a weekly, a monthly is a dawdle. And anthologies are the equivalent of lying on your back in a punt and drifting gently downstream. From my own experience of working for commercial magazines, I do think most of the atmosphere you enjoy does come from a certain editorial attitude, something of an *esprit de corps*, even if you hate everyone else.

I also have pretty much a complete run of *Picture Post* (same original editor) from pre-war to the end. An extraordinary record. Like *Life* or *Paris Match*, but far more socially directed – it had people like James Cameron and other investigative journalists of enormous integrity working for it. *Life* in hard times. Often idiosyncratic. When the editorial policy changed (to bland) in response to falling circulations, it became less than *Life*. Both magazines pre-dated the rise of TV, both supplied a lot of people to TV in the early days (even if only on posh panel games like Patrick Campbell on *My Word*) – almost all the best early TV journalists (*Tonight*, etc.) came from *PP* at some stage. They don't have the same charm as *Pall Mall*, but they have a lot more real social information and angry anti-colonialism (Malaya, Kenya, Egypt) which helped provide the dynamic for the Labour government's dismantling of the Empire. Great pictures of ordinary life. Its



rivals like *John Bull* and *Everybody's* were closer to ordinary magazines and never really had anything like its spirit. Mind you, those are the places to look for Kersh fiction. And Jack Trevor Story, of course. *John O'London's* is worth remembering – kept a lot of writers going in the '40s and '50s. Bought 1,000-words. Paid enough for a week's rent.

Tuesday, 11 May 1999, 15:14

**Digested Fiction**

According to *Men Only* (published by Pearsons since, I believe, 1936) which by September 1951 was “incorporating *The Strand Magazine*,” it was the first UK digest magazine (i.e. pre-*Lilliput*) while *Reader's Digest* was the first US digest. But in 1951 they were still wondering what to call the magazines

“And now America has made up her mind to develop her magazine market along the trail blazed by these young pioneers. Very soon the pocket magazine will become the rule rather than the exception; for when America starts on a job she is usually very thorough about it... Possibly they will have to find a new name for these lively little fellows, for, when you come to think about it, they are really books built to a magazine formula... After all, this very bookishness has a lot to do with their success. If you have compared two passengers in a railway carriage, one wrestling with the large pages of an old-style magazine and the other curled up in a corner seat with, shall we say, a Penguin, you will realize why book-reading on trains is an increasing habit. Why not buy a book-magazine, and have the best of both worlds?”

The only reasonably well-known name, by the way, in that issue was Alan Whicker, with a sub-Kershian low-life story, “Baby Mustn't Do That.” Whicker was another journalist who made his name on *Tonight* but was never the idealist the others were and is now still hacking it out (in Australia, I think). His TV style was a lot more distinctive than his literary style. *Lilliput* around the same period was still running fiction by the likes of Noel Coward, Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene and had a flair which *Men Only* (which ran more “saucy” pix and jokes) never achieved. A genuinely idiosyncratic editorial policy in *Lilliput*, most evident when you start comparing it with rivals like *Men Only*.

Ten years later, of course, pretty much all the different publishers – Newnes (*Strand* etc.), Pearsons (*Pearsons*, etc.) and Amalgamated Press (*Argosy*, etc.), Odhams (who did *Eagle* and *Everybody's*) – had been gobbled up in a massive series of takeovers from the *Daily Mirror* group. I know, I was on the union committee (I couldn't become a NUJ officer until my 21st

birthday) trying to save jobs at the time. And trying to save diversity. Within a couple of years most of the markets for adult fiction had disappeared. Mind you, this Golden Age had a few drawbacks. Frank Hampson, creator of Dan Dare, could tell you for instance how Odhams employed him at a salary, got years of work out of him in advance, then fired him...

Every cheque you got, you signed your rights away by signing the back. We did it cheerfully. Then we sold the piece again under a different title or with the names changed... Or, in my case, turned all my Fleetway Kit Carson comic stories into Johnny Lonesome text stories which I sold to another publisher. Not so easy, of course, for the artists who saw their work recycled under different names for years (a Kit Carson story could be reprinted as a Buffalo Bill by the simple addition of a beard and moustache and equally a BB story could become a Kit Carson by giving Bill a shave). I don't remember anyone ever taking anyone else to court over all that.

Tuesday, 11 May 1999, 18:04

#### New Worlds

Attitudes of *New Worlds* readers changing? Sort of. We lost a lot of the old guard, but that was a bit like dumping the extreme right wing of the Conservative party. Vociferous, but fairly small. Certainly from the large-size issues I made a policy of all editorial matter addressing a general public. Occasionally someone like John Brunner would turn in a review that was clearly addressed to sf fans and I'd find that a bit awkward. I wanted some kind of general audience that was interested in all the stuff that was happening and seeing responses to that. So the audience was that kind of audience. People like me with eclectic tastes for whatever's good in any form. People with curiosity, looking for something that reflected their own experience and enthusiasms. We hit our time. As I say, we lost the grumblers fairly early on. We markedly broadened our readership – and we had support in those days from all sorts of areas, including the ordinary, popular press! Different times indeed, when you got support from most of the red-tops and *The Sun* described me as a saint. (Well, it was just after it stopped being the *News Chronicle* and Peter Phillips, good sf writer, was literary editor and drunk when he went back to the office after we'd had a very sentimental booze-up).

Cultural gurus sought us out. We snubbed half of them. Fairly nicely. When we went to large format, it was reported all over the place. Very few ordinarily educated, media-reading people wouldn't have been vaguely

aware that we existed. The Brighton Arts Festival conference on sf [in 1968] was made up of the likes of me, Disch, Sladek, Ballard, Mike Kustow (director of the ICA), George MacBeth (then, I think, talks or poetry editor of Radio 4), Edward Lucie-Smith, Anthony Haden Guest, Brian Aldiss, Pamela Zoline (I think), Chris Evans (I think), and evidently excluded any input from ordinary sf fandom. A deliberate decision, I might add, on my part. It didn't stop half of fandom turning up and starting a riot under the zesty auspices of Ella Parker and the ever-elloquent Ted Tubb whereupon Mike Kustow made his famous remark about the "anxious-ownership syndrome." But even more ironic was the pop-art painter Richard Hamilton (*Kennedy as an Astronaut, Homage to Chrysler Corp.*, etc.) getting up from the audience and condemning all this artsyfartsy stuff of Ballard's and mine and demanding that we go back to the old standards of *Astounding* and *Forbidden Planet*. By God, it could have been Kingsley Amis making a speech...

Politics and fashions changed, as they do. I'd said at the time that what was substantial about what we were doing could go out with the flotsam when the tide turned. But for a while we had an unprecedented influence within the culture – Ballard and I both had a wide readership, from Hell's Angels to leading newspaper columnists of the day – so in that sense it's not a typical experience. This was also Ladbrooke Grove in the '60s and early '70s. Lots of interaction between *New Worlds*-type writers and the rock-and-roll world. Lots of imaginative stuff, partly attached to psychedelics, but they also helped understand different experiences. Those were the days when Hawkwind was producing chart-topping albums and half my neigh-

bours were more famous than Jesus. I miss it... But I have no regrets. I relished every moment of it. Didn't do my private life much good in the long run. And now, according to *Time Out*, I'm "a cult sci-fi guru" after all, so there's a pretty irony.

Wednesday, 12 May 1999, 10:24

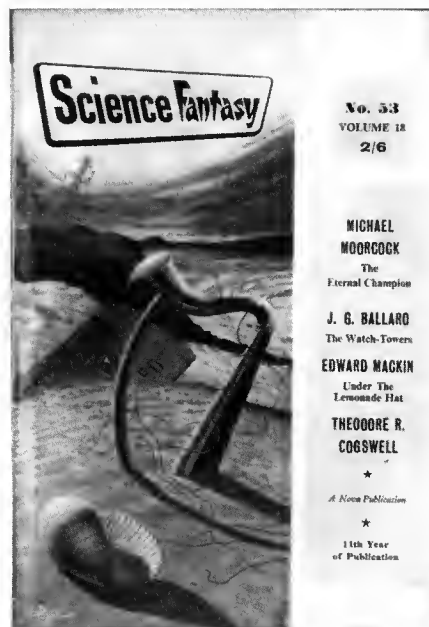
#### Sexton Blake and Others

Strange, with all our references to novels done in magazine form I didn't think of *Sexton Blake*... In fact if you look at the last actual *Sexton Blake Library* issue it has attempted to thin down sideways a bit to look more like a paperback. Bill Baker took the series to Joe Pacey, I think, his old original boss at Panther Books (where Bill had done the Foreign Legion series, amongst others). I was doing the letters page, and I was pushing the Old Boys' Book Club, even though I'd been drummed out of it, as I recall, by then. You saw *Collectors Digest*, but you probably didn't see its hideous rival, my own tabloid-style *Book Collectors News*, which upset all the Old Boys. I can't remember how I upset them. General attitude, I suppose.

It was my defence of the "new" *SBL* under Bill Baker that warmed the old fascist towards me and made him offer me a job after I'd left *Tarzan Adventures*. One of the first things I did (old pulp fan that I am) was to institute a letters column. I did this in the time-honoured way of writing all the original letters myself. It's how I started the *New Worlds* letter column, too...

*Exchange & Mart* was my route to the *Magnet* and *Gem*. Two dealers used to advertise regularly. You could get fairly late copies of the *Magnet* in non-mint condition for about 9d while a better copy could go as much as 1/6 – a fair bit in the early '50s, given my pocket money never went above 2s a week. So religiously I sent off my postal order for 11d (I think) to cover postage and the latest episode of Vernon Smythe's strangely fraught relationship with the rest of Greyfriars (the "Cad of the Remove" was my favourite character – strange how these series are almost always defined by their villains). I liked *Popular*, too, but I also liked *Pluck* ("Night Rider of London Fields," "The House of Mystery") because it tended to go for a slightly more Gothick approach (it should have done since it was reprinting 19th-century stories) and I liked *Nelson Lee* because Edwy Searles Brooks seemed a perfect combination of my two favourite school-story writers of the time – P. G. Wodehouse and Charles Hamilton.

I knew Brooks, who lived a few streets from me in only a slightly posher house than ours – so I learned early that a writer didn't necessarily





get a yacht and a villa in Italy as soon as he was published. He must have run Hamilton a close second and, of course, had a fresh career as Berkeley Grey and Victor Gunn, recycling his old Sexton Blakes for Collins faster than Jim Moffatt trying to finish a Hank Janson before the pub closed. I was always astonished he didn't have every copy of everything he'd written. Now I understand. Brooks, like several journalists and authors of that time, lived in Norbury, where I grew up. Kingsley Amis said *he* was the only famous person ever to come out of Norbury... That man was perhaps the most blinkered writer I ever came across. I used to think all writers had enormous curiosity about everything. I didn't realize that most of them used their work as a kind of barrier against experience.

Thursday, 13 May 1999, 09:36

### "Old Boys' Books"

They weren't all fascists. Some of them were only crypto-fascists... But I must say, working for Bill Howard Baker (who eventually started doing all those *Magnet* reprints) there was no question in my mind that George Orwell was spot-on when he did his famous essay on Hamilton. Somehow, in all of that, however, a lot of us came out perfectly ordinary, principled, tolerant human beings... And there was no question in those stories that bullying a black boy (a fairly common theme in school stories) was not on at all. Paternalistic, definitely, but a long way from vicious. Stereotypes and a lot of "cultural racism" but Germans came out of that a lot worse than Zulus...

I have some great examples of Bill Baker's absolutely loopy theories. It was a weird time for me, looking back. Working for an ex-member of Moseley's Union Movement (ex- because he became impatient with them) while actually infiltrating (as part of the West London Anti-Fascist Youth Committee – that's what things were called in those days) Arnold Leese's outfit which ultimately became Colin Jordan's National Front. I got to know my enemy better than my friends at that point... Yet for all that we carried nothing as vicious as Buchan or Edgar Wallace, and I know wouldn't have tolerated it. Even Hamilton was getting rid of his Jewish stereotypes in the '30s – or at least replacing them with positive "romantic" stereotypes. But then, imagine my shock, when contacting the sf world, thinking this was where I'd find the progressive element...

Thursday, 13 May 1999, 09:45

### Sexton Blake on TV

A new Blake TV series might have worked. The only problem I have with that is watching the way they

butchered the Margery Allingham stories – picking them, it seemed, for period flavour rather than quality and filling the thing up with flashy motors. Decent casting, but all over the place otherwise. And I think the series flopped. Too much posing about, in my view, in *Brideshead Revisited* cast-offs. Took out the dark core of Allingham and added a sort of Woosterish soft centre.

The problem with Blake is that he was fundamentally a cipher – all of his series are defined by their villains – whether it's the earlier ones like Zenith the Albino (thank you, Zenith) or even the criminal family Jack Trevor Story used to write about. Any one could do a Blake now, I'd guess, because Fleetway didn't do a DC on him and trademark his name and likeness.

Thursday, 13 May 1999, 10:16

### Nostalgia vs Change

I have a character in my current book saying that he prefers the approval of the obscure dead to any approval from the living. Some days I feel like that. Maybe it's easier to respect the dead. Especially when they're so lively! I always used to say that an editor had five or ten good years doing any magazine or newspaper. After that, you burn out. You can start up again later or do something else, but by and large it's my experience. I gave myself a particular run as editor of *New Worlds* and started looking around for replacements after about five years (the mastheads should show the actual time), pulling back from direct editing and handing over to people like Jim Sallis, Graham Hall and so on, especially with new writers' issues.

I get no buzz of nostalgia for old pulp stuff, including my own, but I remain fascinated by it. Can't get

enough of it (well, I had enough of *Astounding* after reading my way through a run from the '30s to the '60s I picked up cheap just after I'd become editor of *New Worlds* and thought I'd better see what the Golden Age was all about – absolute crap, as far as I was concerned – astonishingly bad – but there you go – I still love *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, etc., and wish I still had all the *Weird Tales* I used to buy for pennies in Caledonian Road and other markets). Part of it is a reasonable curiosity about roots, I think. Not just literary roots but cultural roots. Popular magazines reflect their times very well and make a very good set of references for the present. The evidence, if you like, for what was happening before the nostalgia, fictionalizing, mythologizing process began. You can go back and check for yourself, including contemporary responses to the stories and features. A little embarrassing for some of us, of course... I wouldn't want my *Tarzan Adventures* editorials to be too well-known... From my own point of view, I know my own memories can be checked, too – verified or contradicted sometimes – but it sort of helps you keep your eye on your own tendency to tell a story in your own favour or whatever.

I still think *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* is crap. I always did. I prefer untrimmed edges on my US magazines! I know it wasn't actually crap. I just didn't like its comfiness, its urbanities. The one thing it never had for me was any kind of real personality. Maybe I just get bored with an evenness of quality. And it didn't have any pictures. Wasn't *Unknown* better? Same quality, better pix? I prefer my magazines to have a bit more vulgarity. A bit of swagger. The reason, by the way, that *New Worlds* went to large size when it did was so we could use a lot more pictures and do a lot more interesting displays. Charles Platt pulled the pocketbooks together nicely with his design (and Keith Roberts covers) to the extent that it became Panther's style (them pinching it from Charles) for a long time, but we wanted splash pages and all the fun of the fair and we were lucky to have Platt, then Platt's protegee Nigel Francis (now dead in a bike accident) and then Richard Glyn Jones. Any old fart can lie in bed chucking manuscripts to left and right, but a good designer's hard to come by.

Re reviving stuff – people frequently suggest that I, or somebody, revive the "old" *New Worlds* – of the '60s, presumably – and I never thought that was on. Times pass. You have your day and that's that. You might be able to do something different, but I know



no way of putting life into something once it's run its course. NW was of its time and doing a job, I think, for its time. Job's over. Dave Garnett produces a collection of quality pretty much as good as any "Best of" anthology and runs some smart, feisty editorials, but he doesn't feel, I'm sure, that he's in no-man's-land 1917, which is how it sometimes felt to us. The immediacy however can be captured over the ether and that's what I like about this medium.

Thursday, 13 May 1999, 10:23

#### Dirty Bits

I should say that many of the dirty puns in Victorian fiction probably weren't unconscious. Only the public was blissfully unconscious. You could check the odd Fleetway comic occasionally, too, for visual puns and so on. My friend Frank Redpath (now a shrink in Hull or somewhere) wrote billions of words for *School Girl Picture Library*. His entire creative talent was devoted to working in words like FLICK and CLINT (the L and I close up on pulp paper) and whenever there was a hostelry involved, well, they all headed off naturally for the Moorcock Inn. How else do you sustain an interest while writing ten serials at the same time? (He went barmy doing it and had to become a shrink.)

Thursday, 13 May 1999, 10:58

#### Thoughts on a New Magazine

Of course it still can be done. You just need to go mad. Most people don't see themselves and their magazine as being identical – which I think is what it takes. Ruins your social life. Most people don't think it's worth it. I thought it was worth it because of the huge build-up of frustration with things as they were. Every attempt to put something together that harks back to some golden age leaves out the missing ingredient: once the magazine has existed and done its job, it no longer has the dynamic – it's sort of arrived. Our changes of policy were again based on that. The late '70s issues have very little similarity, for instance, to the late '60s issues. We shifted our targets. Indeed I probably wrecked my own literary career in some ways by doing those "Crimes Against Literature" issues. Made me lots of enemies. I didn't think people could be so petty. That's the problem of getting used to the levels of insult in fanzines (and these days on the net) – but it also means no matter how nasty the *Sunday Times* might get, say, it can never wound you the way an angry anorak in a fanzine can wound. Good training, sf fandom, as I've frequently said. The rest of the world seemed unusually civil – even a bit wet – in comparison. I prefer argu-

ments with enthusiasts rather than cultural goalies.

Thursday, 13 May 1999, 12:06

#### Format

We had to get different-size binders to offer our readers because of our frequent format-changes. One of them had nothing to do with us – going from Quarto to A4 – but with the changeover to the A-standard paper sizes. I've always preferred quarto to A4 as a format to work in, but there's probably not a lot of difference.

I'll add one thing – we knew that half the people who bought *New Worlds* probably weren't reading it. Something cool to put on the coffee table. I wonder if *Omni* had that understanding, too? You actually relied on non-readers to keep the circulation up. So format there, of course, is even more important. Zippy pix for fast flickthru. I came out of a tradition of commercial periodical publishing (almost ten years before I took over NW) and if there were any useful tricks I could apply to NW I applied them. No compromises, but a realistic understanding of what was involved. Our first interest was always in finding good fiction which preferably nobody else wanted to publish. I should also mention the self-interested angle – we were promoting our own constituency – almost inventing it!

The other trick is to present the material so aggressively and so confidently that the reader goes on buying it even if they don't have any idea what it's all about... Eventually they get used to it. Every magazine I worked on I either changed or joined when it was in the process of change and you know you lose angry regulars every time you change. You get used to ignoring them, not out of any particular disrespect for them, but

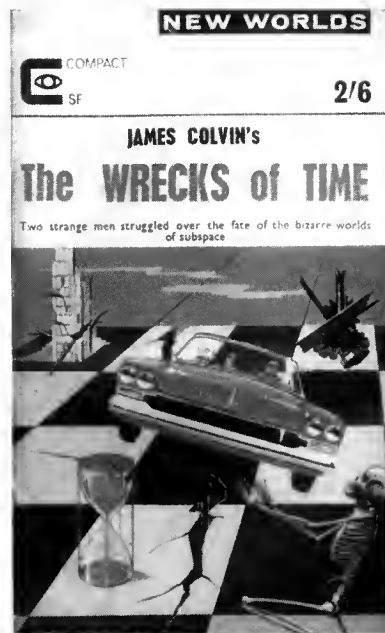
because you know half of them get used to it so fast they forget they were ever upset. Familiarity is what a lot of people value above anything else. And making something familiar – or even seeming familiar – is half the trick. But by that time, of course, it's time to move on again. It's always a sign of editorial desperation, in my view, when you start getting a lot of theme issues (the last run of "regular" *New Worlds* in the late '60s are an example for me – I wasn't editing those 32pp issues – and I honestly think, though it ran some good stuff, it had come to the end of that dynamic).

I certainly don't feel nostalgic for a period of years in which I was obsessed with the finances, censorship attempts and everything else that went with *New Worlds*. On the other hand, I sometimes would like to get back to magazine editing again. I love it almost as much as I like performing on stage. Both probably aren't good for you when you get to my age. You start complaining that there's no disabled access to the stage... I also think you need an instinct for the times to do a good magazine and while my interest and enthusiasm for new work never fades, it's not the same as identifying with it, wanting what you do to take over the world...

Thursday, 13 May 1999, 12:30

#### Hacks

It didn't do a lot of good for Gerald Kersh, that facility, and from my own point of view I had to start trying to curb it. I used to say that I could write a novel in two days, but I needed the third to put the polish on it. You can check it out – *Somewhere in the Night* (*Chinese Agent*) took three days but I only had two days for the sequel *Printer's Devil* (*Russian Intelligence*) and I always felt it showed. Of course, with title changes, they became nice respectable crime comedies from Hutchinson and NEL. I needed the full three days. You develop an arsenal of technical tricks, very useful for doing a fast story virtually anonymously for a magazine but they turn into bad habits if you're trying to tackle a subject that can't be done that way. I wrote a book like *The Ice Schooner* as a serial for *Science Fantasy* knowing full well the cheap devices I was using to carry it – and knowing how those devices detract, ultimately, from the substance of what you may be trying to say. You lose control of thematic material to the tricks of rapid narrative. All the fast writers I knew apart from me and Jack Story were boozers or had some addiction (even strong tea can kill you, Edgar). I loathe Edgar Wallace and continue to do so. There are some writers whose anti-semitism is far too predominant for me – and



that's another thing you get with that kind of hack, quite often. The society of the day is rarely questioned.

Maybe that, after all, is the great attraction of sf as popular fiction – it continues the vulgar, direct kind of attack on the status quo that you got from the likes of Defoe and Gilray. To me Smollett is the hack's hack. There have been some pretty good ones, I agree. But an easy facility, an ability to earn almost anything you want when you need it, can send you out to the pub a bit more than is probably good for you.

Speaking of high-quality hacks, did anyone mention Max Brand? I'm a great fan of his Evan Evans books, which seemed to combine some of the sharp, laconic prose of the *noir* thriller with his Western backgrounds.

Thursday, 13 May 1999, 19:24

### Suspense

I didn't do production on *Suspense* but mostly reading. (I was working for Fleetway, mainly *Sexton Blake Library*, but I also put together quite a few annuals, worked on *Cowboy Picture Library* and *Thriller Picture Library*.) As I recall Joan Aiken was the editor. Didn't know her very well or for very long, since the magazine didn't last. I think I was 19 by the time I was doing that. I can't remember the stories I picked. I didn't think much of any of them, I know, and it was inclined to rely on reprints. Probably didn't have much of a budget.

My youth made things strange for me. I had this weird relationship with the NUJ – although I had the experience necessary to full membership, you couldn't have full membership until you were 21, because that was the youngest they assumed you'd have had the required experience... I was active in the NUJ (these were the days of the gobble-ups) but couldn't be an official until I was 21. So while I was actively on committees, and being threatened with the sack for my activities, I didn't become an official until my 21st birthday when I was instantly co-opted onto the NUJ committee. That's right, I was already a quarrelsome bastard.

Thursday, 13 May 1999, 20:30

### Bester and Paine

Alfie Bester was always the most cosmopolitan sf writer I ever knew. And, of course, my favourite sf writer ever. *Tiger, Tiger* (*The Stars My Destination*) is the great American novel. Libertarian to its core. Tom Paine couldn't have done a better job.

Anyone know much about the livelier 18th-century magazines (speaking of Paine) or early 19th-century, such as Leigh Hunt's *London Journal*? Very hard to come by casually – that generation thing again. These days I look

back at all those *Once a Week*s I spurned. One of my favourite shops at Notting Hill Gate was Sebastian D'Orsai's (which became a framers). A couple of guys. They were fin-de-siècle freaks and they were never expensive. Presumably selling off what they didn't want themselves. You could go in there and buy pretty much any individual copy of the *Strand* throughout its large-size run. They had bound volumes. All kinds of Dowson, greenery-yallery chaps, Irish mystical chaps like AE. I got my *Gods of Pegana* by Dunsany there, very cheap, the best set of Meredith there is, a wonderful illustrated Shakespeare with introductions by all the Edwardian luminaries. But the magazines were astonishing. And, of course, I only bought a few...

But that's the story of my life. Every bonanza I've come upon, I couldn't afford – like the old newsagents in Croydon which was filled with mint magazines and annuals from the '20s on – the annuals still had their greaseproof-type paper wrappers – about to become a lampshade shop, the inheritors had found all this stock unopened. I'd been in and out of the old man's place for years without knowing what he had there. All at the original price. Anyway it was a vast array of stuff (around 1958) when I was attending meetings of the Old Boys' Book Club. I'd told the ladies that most of the magazines would have been remainders, promotional give-aways, which was why he hadn't opened the parcels. Oh, they said, in that case you'd better have them for half-price... I had about 1/9d on me at the time, said I'd be back. And I made the mistake of telling a famous dodgy dealer about it...



Friday, 14 May 1999, 09:46

### Magazine Economics

As far as the economics of doing a regular newsstand magazine are concerned (of the kind we mean), it's a relatively small market. It can support a lot of books but there might not be enough of them to support a regular magazine, whose economics have to include routine publication and all the other boring stuff you have to do. I think we're lucky to have had *Interzone* for as long as we have. *New Worlds* had in its day a lot of general publicity – newsstand distribution and all that – and I was still paying the printing bills five years later. There might be a form that would work, and I'd love to see it, but I can't think of one. Maybe I'm burned out, though. I still think a magazine comes out of a need and that's the magazine which gets the readers. If the need disappears (often because of the magazine) then the magazine tends to go, too. Maybe we should accept that you don't get *Strand*-type longevity any more?

Friday, 14 May 1999, 10:10

### Star Trek and Captain Marryat

You have to learn, I think, to get a real understanding of [past] times – and I read old popular magazines to give me that understanding (I think that's part of all our fascination with the past). Also you learn how fast your own references can make your language seem antique in your own lifetime. Can be a Latin phrase you grew up with (*Magnet* and *Gem*) or a comedian nobody else seems to have heard of any more. Nothing like listening to a politician, for instance, still fighting the battles the rest of us have forgotten – names which have enormous resonance for them are used to underscore significances which continue to escape you... I have a distinct sense of having to modify certain references in certain kinds of fiction (particularly using colloquial or vernacular styles) so that the thing makes the kind of sense I want it to make. I think now, however, that we have such a common pop culture, you can draw on an iconography that does keep a fairly broad relevance. People know vaguely what you're talking about, even if they've never watched an episode of *Star Trek*, say. I don't think I've ever watched one all the way through myself, but of course the names of the characters and the basic vocabulary, words and images, are part of the culture and I can draw on them, say, for a metaphor knowing I'm communicating with most people.

On the other hand, if you're aggressive about it, you can bring some of those references back. I mentioned Captain Marryat somewhere – and the spontaneous combustion scene in

*Jacob Faithful* – and have seen that pop up twice recently in casual reference for the first time in 50 years at least. Iain Sinclair, in his bookseller guise, knows you can do that, too. Two or three enthusiasts can make it look like an author's having a comeback. But it does actually put it back into the culture. Kersh is a good example. And there are several others. We've probably all done it. An enrichment process, I think. A sign of a really successful revival is when everybody suddenly starts talking about the revived author as if they've always been fans. The evidence never seems to support the numbers, does it? Otherwise we'd have a huge potential readership for that magazine we're talking about.

By the way, I haven't mentioned this yet, but *New Worlds* is involved in a big online project which will be both archive and new fiction. I mean to develop the policies of *NW* to take advantage of the medium. No conventional fiction at all. I would hope we can link up with the best online zines which should effectively give the reader the scope and variety we're talking about. Polemics, probably, too. We hope to encourage experiments which will make new or different uses of the medium. Currently working on the basics. The guy I'm working with is a genius.

Friday, 14 May 1999, 10:45

#### Violence!

Partly the problem, if you found a publisher, would be one of patronage. That's essentially, in my experience, what happens when a book publisher, say, funds or helps fund a literary magazine. The trouble with the money, as we know from movies, is that for some reason it feels it has a voice and an opinion. It usually wants at least a chance of a profit. And it isn't done for profit, it's done for dodgy reasons (patronage again).

This is part of the problem I have with government arts funding, for instance. Unless you resist hard, you find yourself under pressure to be more civilized... I think good magazines are being produced now and they are being produced out of a sense of necessity. I doubt if a general fiction magazine with an urbane, civilized feel to it (such as *Lilliput* had) would do it – that middle-class market is very conservative indeed. And who else would buy it?

I honestly believe that you don't get a big market without filling a magazine with recycled ideas. All the magazines, as far as I can tell, recycle like that. We used to have a deliberate five-year cycle at Fleetway, knowing that's how long younger readerships last. Ten years for older, and so on. Innovation, apart from some format

changes usually borrowed from elsewhere or just a slight angle on the mixture as before, is anathema. Iain Sinclair was asked to write a piece I think for the *Independent* on "unknown" writers, the "underground" or marginal culture. Which he was glad to do, of course. Kersh. Jack Trevor Story. Various other good writers and painters. Next thing is the editor rings him and says "can we cut out all these names you have in here – nobody's ever heard of them." That's been Sinclair's experience in other areas, too. We're living with a very unaggressive arts culture (everything else is possibly too aggressive) it seems at the moment. That's why I respond so positively, I think, to what the likes of Stuart Home are doing – taking from pulp culture what is vital, swaggering and in-your-face.

Makes you want to shave your head, put on a pair of big braces and some Doc Martins and go and sort out a couple of literary editors. There is, I will admit, no greater joy than doing violence to a bad publisher. I once had the pleasure of cracking two of their heads together. Felt ashamed of myself. But I remember the pleasure quite as thoroughly as the shame. Everyone came up and congratulated me... My friend Mike Dempsey and I had a very sweet period of carrying our ideas into the publishing world with fist and magnum (M&C not S&W) and I sometimes think that violence is the only answer to our literary dilemmas. We were attacked by eight drunken *Penthouse* staff, once, at a party of Pam Zoline's. They were wearing suits and had a predatory air to them. They seemed to think we were trying to score Lynn Whatsername, who became a respectable columnist, whereas we were merely saying hello to someone we recog-

nized. Suits! Surrounded. Baffled, still cheerful, I was borne down under the weight of the bastards. Took the table with us. Heard a voice shouting from above "Take your hands off him, you bastards!" and here comes Dempsey. Together we trounced the fuckers and very good it was too. Those publishing bastards have no stomach for a real fight. Our hostess approved. A few cuts and bruises and a deeper sense of satisfaction than almost anything in the world. We took our literature seriously in those days.

Maybe that's the problem with net feuds. People don't get out into the streets and publishing parties enough. Why haven't *we* had a mass shooting, yet? Shows what nerds most authors are. There must be someone out there willing to turn themselves into a living bomb. Oh, my god, I'm becoming a Futurist. I really should get back to my proper job. If you don't hear from me for a while, I'm earning a living. If you hear from me soon, I've put such ideas behind me. Avante!

Friday, 14 May 1999, 15:02

#### Time-Warped?

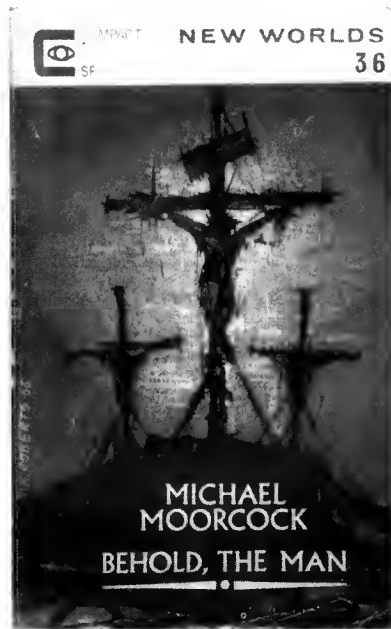
You customize a book just by reading it. It becomes yours in a way no performance can be yours. Virtual Reality, on the other hand, should be able to give us everything eventually. Hooked as I am on books, I have a strong feeling there are too many other forces – including consumerism – working to marginalize them. As it is I suspect demographics is what's keeping the book trade running as well as it is. But how long will it be before the majority of us have little desire to read fiction? Our current culture doesn't seem to me to be either book- or education-friendly. How many buyers of fantasy trilogies, for instance, would keep on buying those trilogies if they could have a kind of permanent VR (Watchman?) giving them an elaborate running RPG in which they could function and earn wages (*The Accountants of Middle Earth*). Maybe we'll be back to the situation Mike Ashley described in reference to 18th-century periodicals – just the few of us, making references increasingly obscure to the general public... *Plus ça change...*? Sartor resartus? Time-warped? Playing the rubber toad... But having a good time, anyway.

Oops, this isn't the way to the workplace...

Friday, 14 May 1999, 22:43

#### The Rise of Consumerism

I think there are various inevitabilities which seem to accompany a consumerist economy – or indeed, what they call a free-market economy (i.e. deregulated) – and much of it comes down to dividing and ruling, of the need of a business, or an economic sys-





tem, to keep proliferating. If, for instance, you turn doctoring into a business, as they have done in the USA pretty thoroughly, instead of a service (as it remains in most northern European countries, say), then you begin to get a proliferation of specialities. Business has to expand. Increasingly the GP acts as a referral to other arms of the business, in which everyone gets a share. Instead of a leg doctor, you get a toe doctor, an instep doctor, an ankle doctor, a shin doctor, a knee doctor and a thigh doctor (why does this sound familiar from all those *Housewives' Choice* Smith Bros. air-plays...?). This has actually happened. Used to be you paid a radiographer, say, for the x-ray and diagnosis. Now they come separately. To my mind this is about the best illustration of why you can't apply the system very successfully outside of the cattle market, but there you go – it actually works against consolidation. In fact it pretty much depends on an accelerated rate of entropy, of proliferation.

That said, specialist magazines aren't new. We used to test new magazines by taking the most popular feature ("Roy of the Rovers," say) and basing an entire magazine on that feature to see

how it would work (*Shoot!* I think the paper was called, Dave Gregory did it) so publishers have always looked to what these days is called a niche market. Since we live in a consumer culture now (i.e. one that begins to justify itself in its own terms – which is partly I think why we're so thoroughly at odds with the rest of the world at the moment – some of those bastards just won't hear the truth), we're faced with that logic. We can mourn the death of the local stores, but we're still shopping at Tescos and Walmart (about the only consolidating part of the process). The market controls the consumer. The consumer dissipates, the market consolidates. Oo-er. We could try and reverse the terrifying rise of consumerism (a mad ideology if ever there was one) or try to divert it a little, but I suspect none of us has the will or the understanding to try. What would happen, I wonder, if all the semi-pro, small circulation magazines that are so good – say *The Edge*, *Interzone*, *Third Alternative* – came together as one magazine?

Would their circulations increase in proportion? I seriously doubt it. However, the notion of an interlinked electronic forum/fiction/archive multi-edited magazine – i.e. all of us

coming together – with all kinds of useful links, so that the whole thing became fundamentally non-linear – seems to me a wonderful goal to aim for (that and ensuring nobody hits on the idea of rationing electricity for "green" reasons and thus actually controlling our source of power... always a worry).

One area, I suspect, where the forces of consumerism don't necessarily hold all the cards or control the logic, is here. And a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic webzine would generate enormous energy within itself, I'd guess, as well as stimulating others. Maybe we just have to think in terms of thousands and thousands of us, all working in synch, sharing a culture like a shared magazine, producing extraordinary cross-currents, cross-fertilization. An orchestra rather than solo performers. I don't think we're very far from that. On the other hand I could be barking barmy. Who knows. Adieu! I leave.

Michael Moorcock

*In fact, Mike sent many more messages to Fictionmags over the next few days – another 20,000 words or so – but, alas, there isn't space for them here.*

David Pringle

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Did the earth move for you when the Y2K bug struck? As early as October 1999, the Waterstone's on-line bookshop was listing new-year titles with such interesting dates as "1st January 1900." But this column is fully Y2K complaint and ready to face the year 2000000XOX FATAL ERROR \* COLUMNIST SHUT DOWN \* RELAX DAVE AND TAKE A STRESS PILL

## MASQUE OF THE RED SHIFT

**Frank Bryning** (1907-1999), Australian author of many short sf stories over five decades, died on 12 October aged 92.

**Greg Egan** bewails certain decadent countries' small-press ethics: "Having declined to give an interview to UK magazine *Dreamwatch*, I was bemused to discover that they've gone ahead and published one anyway. In their September issue, they've cobbled together answers from past interviews on my web site with questions that bear little resemblance to the ones I was answering, and passed off the resulting collection of *non sequiturs* as an interview of their own."

**Eddie Jones** (1935-1999), British sf artist, died on 15 October at age 64, after weeks in hospital following a stroke. He was a pioneer of glossily representational paintings of space scenes and hardware. Rog Peyton of Andromeda Bookshop wrote his obituary for *Interzone*. There are hopes of a memorial collection of his art: contact Eddie Jones Memorial Fund c/o Andromeda, 2-5 Suffolk St, Birmingham, B1 1LT.

**Charles Platt** was charged with three misdemeanours last summer, the most serious being for the hideous alleged crime of giving alcohol to someone under 21 at an open-air party in Jerome, Arizona. It may be relevant that, earlier, he had criticized local police... All charges were dropped in October, the alcohol one on condition that Platt left town; he'd already departed owing to "personal-ity conflicts." At the 1999 North American SF Convention, Harlan Ellison exulted over the charges before a large audience, claiming that Platt (who in fact has no criminal record) had a lurid history of illicit sex, and bragging of having phoned the Jerome police to tell them this. Always a helping hand from Harlan!

**Carl Sagan** surely never had a weight problem of the order implied in Lynn Yarris's review of *Carl Sagan: A Life* by Keay Davidson: "...he was a six-foot gravity well toward whom everyone naturally gravitated." (*San José Mercury News*, 24 Oct) Shades of *Raft*...

## ANSIBLE LINK



DAVID LANGFORD

**Walt Willis** (1919-1999), acclaimed as sf fandom's finest writer and editor of the 1950s and '60s, died last October after a long period in care. He was 79. His influence was enormous – co-editing the legendary Irish Fandom fanzines *Slant* and *Hyphen*, mythologizing the fan community in *The Enchanted Duplicator* (with Bob Shaw), writing scores of highly-polished columns, articles and reports later assembled in Richard Bergeron's remarkable 614pp hardback fanzine *Warhoun 28* (shortlisted for the Hugo)... and much more.

## INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

**Publishers and Sinners.** At last October's creditors' meeting for bankrupt Pulp Publications, the usual gloomy news emerged: Pulp owed £56,800, with assets of £16,600 at best. Creditors include the Finnish printers (£17,900) and UK artist Bob Covington (£2,600), who painted many book covers and was never paid. Pulp's Matt Weyland, now working for a London publisher, promised that original artwork would be returned.

**World Fantasy Awards.** Novel: Louise Erdrich, *The Antelope Wife*. Novella: Ian R. MacLeod, "The Summer Isles." Short: Kelly Link, "The Specialist's Hat" (*Event Horizon*, Nov). Collection: Karen Joy Fowler, *Black Glass*. Anthology: Jack Dann and Janeen Webb, *Dreaming Down-Under*. Artist: Charles Vess. Special Professional: – Jim Turner, Golden Gryphon Press. Special Non-Pro: Richard Chizmar, *Cemetery Dance*. Life Achievement: Hugh B. Cave.

**Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine**, despite Bradley's recent death, is continuing publication – at least for the present – under Ann Sharp, the trustee for the trust which owns the magazine.

**Potterism.** Ubiquitous Harry Potter turned up in *The New Yorker*, with a squib about the fact that J. K. Rowling's books have been painstakingly translated into American for fear of baffling US kids with enigmas like "wonky" ("crooked") or "barking mad" ("complete lunatic"), while leaving them to cope with "git," "nutters" and "shirty" – the latter cautiously italicized to show it's not a typo. One pun falls by the wayside: mending magic wands with Spellotape is not permitted in a land where only "Scotch tape" is deemed understandable.

**Prisoner of Sex.** Portmeirion village and *Prisoner* fandom are aghast, if not akimbo, at the discovery of a Swedish porn video entitled *Private No. 21* (1997) which features a 10-minute hardcore episode blasphemously shot within the Village itself. Use of the term "Pornmeirion" has reportedly been frowned on... Legal action may loom.

**In Typo Veritas.** "He gave the Princess a farewell kiss that she bore with only a faint whimpering nose in her throat, and then slid out of the hovercar." (Debra Doyle & James D. MacDonald, *The Price of the Stars*... hastily corrected after first Tor printing)

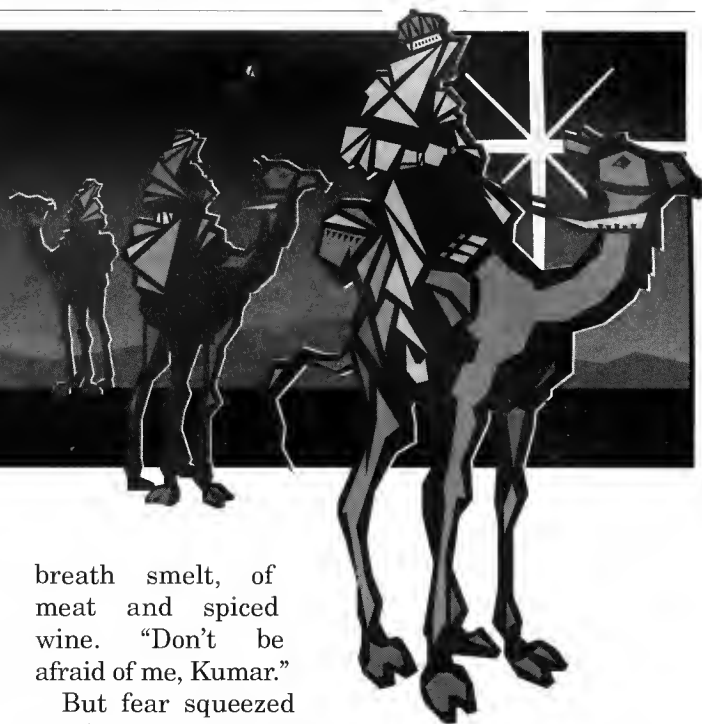
**Slow Glass?** Again the vital importance of patenting sf ideas is shown, as the *Telegraph* (7 Oct) reported a Japanese optics company's development of glass that stores and later emits light... alas, Bob Shaw didn't live to see this.

**Pringlewatch.** In an old tv script *Kim Newman* discovered what he calls a predictive vision of the growth of *Interzone* into the new millennium: "You know, somewhere out there, beyond the Post Office Tower, there's a vast committee called Pringle, constantly regenerating itself." (Troy Kennedy Martin, "Thin Ice" episode, *The Sweeney*, 1975)

**Thog's Masterclass.** *Dept of Neat Tricks*: "She had never drunk brandy before. How could she have known it would be so much stronger than wine? She finished what was in her cup as the duchess poured her a bit more." (J. Gregory Keyes, *Newton's Cannon*, 1998) "Laurie reassembled herself without altering her position or moving any part of her body." (Peter Straub, *Mr X*, 1999) "That would give Doretia a chance to wear that strange gown that Great-Grandmama had left her in the will that was open at the sides and showed a daring hint of undergown." (Jody Lynn Nye, "Don't Break the Chain!", *Chicks 'n Chained Males* 1999) "Loud bird calls barked from the next tree over." "He looked in the rearview mirror, and his heart leaped into his throat as he saw it coming at him from behind." (both Walter Jon Williams, *The Rift*, 1999)

# Balthazar's Demon

*Sarah Singleton*



The heat slipped away with the sun, the lid of the day's furnace, and the vast, cold night pressed down on the surface of the desert. The stars swam out in a tide. Exposed upon the land, the men lit a fire and crouched near the flames. The camels moaned, picking at fronds of hay and a young man plucked discordant notes from a zither.

Balthazar wandered from the fire, swaying like a drunk, tearing strands from his hair. Red weals broke his face, fresh and half-healed. He mumbled to himself, snatches of verse, broken songs, the trailing ends of a dialogue.

Kumar shivered, drawing the blanket tighter about his shoulders, swallowing his fear.

"The demon is always stronger at night."

A hand pressed his shoulder, and Kumar started. He looked up, into the thin, whited face of the second magician, Melchior.

"Are you afraid, Kumar?" Melchior sat beside him. His robe crackled, flecks of light sparking from the gems embroidered in the heavy silk, dull amber and smoky pearl. Gold thread glimmered, unthreading here and there, worn by the journey. Balthazar shouted out, one sharp, animal note that silenced the men for a moment. In the east, the star guttered and swelled.

"Are you afraid, Kumar?" The voice caressed, and the hand moved gently to the boy's arm. Kumar swallowed thickly, unable to speak. His fear possessed him, as the demon possessed Melchior, a palpable presence, stroking his skin like a knife, eating into his flesh.

"You are safe, Kumar. Haven't I shown you?" Melchior shifted slightly, and Kumar breathed the scent of the magician's body, stale sweat, and the desert's dust, overlaid with jasmine oil, and more, the choking incense, burned when they prayed to the demon. Paint gathered in the creases of his skin, white cracks around his soft, purple mouth. Scented wax clotted his hair, reddish with henna.

The young man playing the zither began to sing. The camels shifted, hobbles jingling.

"I must see to the camels." Kumar said quickly, struggling to his feet, but Melchior seized his arm. The bright gold rings on his fingers pinched. He pulled Kumar down again.

"Leave the beasts," Melchior said softly. The streaks of his decorated face shifted in the fire's fitful light. His

breath smelt, of meat and spiced wine. "Don't be afraid of me, Kumar."

But fear squeezed the boy's heart, beating fit to burst, and pinched his hands till they shook. Melchior sighed and smiled, rising to his feet, allowing himself to stroke the boy's head as he left.

"We will leave when the men have eaten," Melchior said. "Be sure you take your share. Then ready the camels."

Kumar watched him walk away from the fire, to Balthazar. Solicitous, Melchior guided Balthazar to the mouth of the tent and plied him with bread and wine, though he ate fitfully, the wine spilling from his lips to his beard, the bread chewed and swallowed in lumps. Melchior tended him like a child.

Kumar huddled in his blanket, shrinking in the face of the terrible chill. Winter was drawing on again. For winter it had been when Kumar had left his family, in a village to the west of Elam, when the Persian magicians arrived with gold and spices, servants, and a dozen men with bows and blades. The villagers were voluble and obsequious, greedy and afraid. And Kumar had been traded by his father, along with the camels, for the journey across the mountains of Arphaxad to the west. His mother had wept, briefly, his sisters squeezing the fabric of her skirt in their hot fingers, three elder brothers already far away, tending goats on the hills. And the company had travelled, through the long summer, in the kingdom of Nimrod, and Assyria to the south, to the dusty plains and the broken towns of Shiuar, over the Hiddekej river and into Sabtechah. Now the Mountains of Gilead rose before them, and Judea beyond. The year's journey coming to an end.

The wooden plate fell from Balthazar's hands, to the ground. His fingers lifted to his face, digging into the skin, so the old wounds began to bleed afresh. Melchior shook his head gently.

"Don't," he said. "Take this." He placed a torn piece of cloth in Balthazar's lap, and Balthazar picked it up, shredding the fabric, gnawing the loose shreds with shattered teeth. How long could he live like this? Kumar had

seen him chewing stones and mutilating insects. Once he had ripped up, piece by piece, a wounded lamb they had found on a hillside, in a pool of black blood, in the shadow of a rock. Frustrated and indiscriminate, the impulse drove Balthazar to damage himself, chewing his tongue, or his fingers.

The light shifted in the sky, briefly red, like a ball of blood. Balthazar lurched to his feet, crying out.

Kumar loaded the camels. The tents were dismantled and folded away. A servant kicked sand on the embers, obliterating the camp. Of the six camels, four carried baggage. Melchior and Balthazar rode the two remaining.

The animals sidled away when Balthazar approached them, snorting and bellowing, till Kumar kicked the elder one behind its knee, and still protesting, it knelt down, front, and back, and Balthazar was helped up, into the saddle. Scabs spotted the animal's shoulders. Kumar, the youngest of the company, was also allowed to ride, perching on top of the baggage like a monkey.

The camels weaved through narrow tracks in the sand and slabs of stone. The star blazed, illuminating the desert in a spectrum of copper and apricot, ochre and cinnamon, the rims of the mountains aureate in the unwholesome night. They crossed a plateau of shattered rock, where the red rubble and flat slabs were burned and exposed, like the bones of the earth. The camels' spongy feet padded down and down, spitting tiny clouds of dust from the path. Balthazar began to sing, in a language Kumar didn't understand. The dim, jaded moon rose and sank in a shallow crescent to the west.

Melchior reined in his camel to ride beside the boy. The servants looked away, exchanging glances.

"Not long now," Melchior said. "Soon I can release the demon." His hands were very slim on the tasselled reins. He brandished the little whip, so the camel tossed its head, flicking its ears.

"And Balthazar will be free. The demon is drawn between two places. One foot, so to speak, in the element of its own origin, the other here, in the soul of Balthazar. The demon gives him the power to divine the child's location, fixing the torch in the sky to guide us."

Kumar didn't answer. He fixed his gaze on the ground, not wanting to hear. Melchior sometimes talked to him about the demon, sharing a confidence. It occurred to Kumar that Melchior himself was not immune to the fear soaking them all.

Melchior, the authority, as Balthazar battled for his wits.

The palace of Herod the Great towered white as bone above the city. High above, the star faded in the daylight. The company passed through the streets, on display. Herod's guards escorted them from the city gates. Melchior had painted his face afresh, and combed the lice from his hair. Balthazar's wrists were tied discretely, his scratched face livid and infected. Preened and polished, the men-at-arms marched in rank behind Melchior and Balthazar. Kumar hurried on foot, herding the pack animals at the rear.

He had never visited a city before. Women peeped from the dark windows of squat stone houses. Children

emerged from poorer dwellings, precarious shelters of branches and palm leaves, to shade their eyes and stare at the visitors. Pigs and scraggy hens scratched in the straw and stinking rubbish in the street. As they neared the palace, traders jostled, selling sweet drinks, baked meat, offerings for the temple. Women squatted near the walls, with a handful of bright fruit lying on a shawl.

The palace gates opened like teeth to receive them. In silence they passed through stone battlements. Kumar sensed the movement of soldiers in the shadows high above. In the courtyard, men emerged from the stables, to tend the camels.

Herod's palace, cold and white, reared above them in billows and branches of marble. They followed in the wake of the King's men, in corridors and stone halls, to the throne room. Then, in an antechamber, they were obliged to wait for Herod to finish his meal, to dip his fingers in rosewater and rearrange his robes. A priest in black, an Ethiopian, welcomed and questioned them. And they waited again, while the priest ran to his master and reported their request. Kumar stood behind Melchior, staring at the unravelled hem of his cloak. Pearls of sweat glistened on his neck. But the priest returned and, smiling, ordered the doors to be opened.

Melchior took a breath, straightened himself, and led them into the presence of Herod the Great. Balthazar stepped in beside him, meek for the moment. And then, Kumar, the servants, and the retainers in rank.

The king was sitting in the heart of the room, upon a dais. Columns rose up, and up, to a cupola, decorated with vines and flowers inlaid with mother of pearl and lapis lazuli. Bowls of flowers, red as wine, rested upon low wooden tables where sticks of incense burned lazily, choking the air. Priests and teachers huddled about the king. Courtiers stood below the dais, flicking their attention from the king to the visitors, and back again, gauging a response.

Without lowering his eyes, Melchior bowed. Kumar and the rest of the company followed suit. But Herod's eyes were drawn to Balthazar, fretting at his bonds.

Melchior spoke. His voice thinned in the space of the throne room.

"Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews? We saw his star in the east, and have come to worship him."

Herod blinked.

The courtiers froze. In the poised moment, Kumar held his breath, waiting for hidden swords to be drawn, for the opening of the path to the prisons below the palace. Herod stood up abruptly. A murmur rose in a tide amongst the courtiers, to be stilled again, by a gesture from the king.

"Come closer," Herod said. Melchior and Balthazar climbed the three steps of the dais. Herod towered above them, a fierce young man, his hair thick and black. But a softness under his eyes, veins breaking in the surface of his skin, suggesting over-indulgence and the onset of bodily corruption.

"What is the matter with him?" he asked. "Is he mad?"

He studied Balthazar carefully, with clever eyes. Then he returned to his seat.

"Not here," he said. "No birth. No new king." Then,



addressing the priests and the court, "Does anyone know where the child can be found, who is born King of the Jews?"

The perfumed smoke fluttered. Carefully blanked, the faces of the courtiers.

"No," Herod said. "Nobody knows. A King is born, and magi arrive bringing gifts from Sabea and Arabia, and here in the palace of Herod the Great, amongst the teachers of the law and the king's high priests, nobody knows where he is. Perhaps you have made a mistake?"

Melchior half turned his face from the king.

"Perhaps," he said.

"But you think not?"

The priests shuffled uneasily. Herod paled.

"You are mistaken," the king said. "Take your men away. Return to your country."

Without ceremony they were ushered away, and left to wait again in the antechamber. But a steward appeared with orders from Herod for the magi to leave in the morning. The men were served platters of mutton, fruit and bread in the servants' quarters, while Melchior and Balthazar were led away to grander accommodation. Melchior kept Kumar beside him, to act as his personal servant. The room overlooked a courtyard, where waxy lilies floated in a tank of black water, and a peacock screeched in a tree. The demon's star flamed and dimmed, waning as Balthazar weakened. Kumar filled a silver bowl with water, to bathe Balthazar's face and wounded mouth. His skin sagged in folds, a corpulent man now reduced and eaten away. Threads of white sprouted in his lank hair and beard. His breath smelt of sulphur, and rotten meat. Melchior stood at the window, twisting his hands, waiting for the inevitable summons.

Late in the night, the Ethiopian priest knocked on the door and led them through the darkened corridors to the king's own chamber.

Candles burned, illuminating silk tapestries on the walls. Sitting on a pale, sandalwood chair, Herod was flanked by several other men, two of them possibly Romans, others teachers of the law, and the priest who had brought them.

"The boy?" Herod said, gesturing to Kumar.

"Mine," Melchior said quickly. "To tend Balthazar."

"Yes. The priests tell me he's possessed. Holding the tail of a demon. And the demon has divined the presence of the child?"

Melchior nodded. In a moment of lucidity, Balthazar raised his eyes to Herod. The red light blazed in his face, and he displayed his broken teeth in a grin:

"A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

But the light dimmed again, and Balthazar himself began to weep. The teachers whispered to each other.

"What does he say?" Herod said quickly. "What does he mean?"

One of the priests spoke up. "He quotes the prophet Jeremiah."

"The prophets, yes." Herod struggled to regain his

calm. "The prophets say the child would be born in Bethlehem, in Judea."

He questioned Melchior closely, about the demon's star, and the exact time of its appearance. And he studied Balthazar, his distasteful wounds, his absent gaze.

"Why are you looking for the child?" Herod asked at last.

"To worship him," Melchior said simply. But Herod brooded, biting his lip.

"No," he said. "At such a cost?" He gestured to Balthazar. "There is more. Have you come to kill him?"

Kumar gasped involuntarily. Melchior shook his head. Was this the truth? If the Persians were afraid, how much more did Herod the Great have to fear?

"Go and make a careful search for the child," Herod said. "As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too, may go and worship him."

Dismissed, they withdrew from the room. In the darkness Melchior clasped Kumar's fingers. Melchior's hand was cold and sweaty at once.

Seven miles from the city gates, one of the men shouted out:

"We are followed!"

In the distance a white horse trotted in a swirl of red dust, on the road to Bethlehem. Melchior signalled to the company to pull off the road, and they waited for the horseman. To the west, an old man herded a dozen black goats off the road, and into the rocks and thorns. The rider pushed his horse into a canter. The hoofbeats quickened, louder now. Then, in a sudden clatter, the horse reined up before them, an arab mare caparisoned in green and gold, and mounted upon her, the Ethiopian priest from Herod's palace.

Melchior frowned.

"What do you want? Why have you followed us?" he shouted. His voice broke, becoming shrill.

"I am coming with you. To worship the young king," the priest said.

"Herod's spy," one of the servants muttered. Melchior signalled the man to be silent. He stared at the priest. The mare wheeled and snorted, her neck iron-grey with sweat.

"What's your name?" Melchior said slowly. He wrinkled his face, still considering.

"Khaspar," the priest said. A long sword was strapped to the side of his saddle.

"Come then, Khaspar. The star is moving." Melchior urged his camel back to the road and kicked it to a trot. The men glanced at one another, quietly cursing the priest.

Beyond the walls of the town, Melchior squatted in his tent rattling bones in a painted wooden cup. Kumar crouched in the shadows, just behind him. An oil lamp burned steadily. Outside the priest rested apart from the others, the white mare tethered beside him. Balthazar lay upon the ground, moaning softly, digging his broken nails into the dusty ground.

"Not long," Melchior said. "Tomorrow we'll find the child and release Balthazar."

"And the priest?"

Melchior shook the cup again, squeezing his eyes shut. He cast the bones upon the ground in a tumbled web. He

peered and muttered, plucking his lip.

"What do you see?" Kumar asked, hopping forwards. Fragile finger bones, some painted, and set with fragments of ruby or garnet, blinking in the lamplight.

"Birth. Death. Blood. What do you see? It doesn't help me." Melchior scooped up the bones and dropped them into the cup again.

"I can't sleep," he said. "Sit beside me. Brush my hair."

Kumar took up the comb. The star hovered above the town, spilling a corrupt orange light upon the houses.

The star came to rest above a narrow house in the eastern quarter. It hung like a bag of ash, glowing dully in the daylight.

Melchior stepped forward, and knocked upon the door. An old woman answered, covering her face with a veil. When she saw the grand men outside the house she drew back in alarm, and shut the door, returning a few moments later with a hawkish, middle-aged man.

Melchior bowed low.

"We have come to worship the boy who is King of the Jews," Melchior said. He gestured to one of his servants, who was carrying a small wooden chest.

"We have gifts," he said. "Can we see the child?"

The man scrutinized them carefully. He stood in the doorway, strong and square, blocking their way. Then he nodded.

"Come in," he said. He led them to a courtyard where a young girl nursed a toddler. When she saw the men, she plucked her breast from the child's lips and stood him on the ground. Clinging to his mother's dress, the boy regarded his visitors. Melchior stepped forward.

"This is the child?" he asked. The girl nodded nervously, her eyes still fixed on her little son. Melchior sank to his knees.

The servant brought chests and caskets, which Melchior opened and displayed. Sabbean gold, pressed into coin, wrought in bracelets and bangles. Incense and spices, and silks spilling, indigo, amber and rose. Sealed jars of oils and anointments, myrrh and aloes. The old woman, lingering behind the young mother, murmured and fluttered her fingers. The husband remained impassive, before the display of wealth. The child stared at Balthazar, who knelt behind the others, covering his face with his hands.

"We've come for the boy," Melchior said at last. The girl looked up.

"What d'you mean?" The hawkish husband took a step forwards.

"The boy – you're not his father. He doesn't have a father. He was conceived by a spirit, yes? So we've divined. If we take him, he will be trained and educated. We will help him."

The man looked at the riches laid before him. Khaspar lifted his head, focusing on Melchior.

"You've come to buy him," the man said. He picked up the child protectively. Kumar, similarly purchased, ached to think how eagerly his own father had pocketed a handful of copper coins and handed him over to the Magi.

"He will be safe with us. We can protect him," Melchior said.

"And corrupt him, and use him," the man answered. Anger darkened his face. "Pack up your goods," he said. "Leave the house."

Melchior deliberated. Would he snatch the boy and make off with him? The armed men waited outside – but the gates of the town could be sealed, the Roman Guard summoned. Wisely Melchior signalled for the goods to be packed up and taken away again. The old woman sighed audibly. The man stood close to his wife, the child safely between them. Above the house, the star hovered still, polluting the rooms with the smell grown familiar in Kumar's nose, the perfume of fear.

They waited beyond the town walls. The moon rested above the rooftops, clear and silver, like a lake. The air was cold and sharp, stinging Kumar's fingers. The camels shifted and belched noisily, breaking the icy silence. The men waited, poised.

How long must they stand? High above, the moon glistened. Slabs of rock reflected white. A red scorpion scuttled across Kumar's foot, so he jumped and exclaimed, and the other men cursed.

Melchior stood before them, watching the town. The white mare pawed the ground, the priest already sitting in the saddle.

Then – a movement in the shadows at the base of the eastern wall. A figure emerged into the moonlight, hurrying towards them. Melchior took several steps towards him, the man running, and held out his arms.

"Do you have him? Did you get him?"

The man, breathless and sweating, unwound his cloak. His hands were dark and sticky.

"The old woman. I killed the old woman," he said. He was shaking, unfolding the child from his chest. Melchior took the little boy with a peculiar tenderness. Perfectly awake, apparently undisturbed, the boy gazed up at him with an adult gravity.

"Quick," Melchior said. "Time to go. Bind the child to me, Kumar, hurry."

"No. Put the boy down. On the ground."

A staccato of hooves, the white mare snorting. Melchior paused. High above his head, Khaspar's thin, bright sword depended.

"Put the boy down!" he screeched. "Put the boy down or I'll kill you!"

Melchior didn't move. His soldiers edged forwards, shouldering their own weapons.

"Tell them to keep back!" the priest shrilled. "Now!" He jerked the sword a little higher, ready to swipe. Melchior trembled. The men shuffled back. Very slowly, Melchior lowered the little boy. At a distance, Kumar saw the soft infant feet press upon the cold stones.

"You will kill him?" Melchior asked quietly, still holding the boy's arm.

"Herod wants him dead. Stand back." The mare sidled, but the priest drew her sharply to a standstill, jabbing her sides with his spurs.

"Stand back, I say!"

Reluctantly, Melchior drew away. The priest swung the sword. In the length of the blow, the blade flashed black

and white. The little boy looked up.

From Balthazar's mouth, the demon roared. In the sky, the star bulged and quivered. It was plucked, like a fruit, and hurled at Khaspar, in a trail of cinnamon flame, catching him in a fist of innumerable fingers. The priest yelped, in the demon's fire, and the sword was pitched upwards, and down, piercing the soil, where it stood erect, swaying like a flower.

The demon tore itself from Balthazar's body in a fury. The binding snapped at his wrists. Boils swelled and erupted on his skin, like a plague. Blood spurted from his nose, ears and eyes. He screamed and tore at his skin, flailing and kicking. The white mare screeched and plunged.

The priest fell heavily to the ground, the star's dissolute fire still dancing on his body, burning skin and flesh and blood.

And Balthazar slumped, cast off and discarded. The mare galloped away into the night. The shrinking flames licked the priest's bones, and died away.

Quiet, again.

Untouched by the sword, the priest or the horse, the little boy stood where Melchior had placed him. But the demon rose up, fully fashioned. Melchior choked a high sob. Kumar looked at the magician quickly, seeing, as though for the first time, the unbearded face and the slender hands.

Beautiful, the demon. Its golden eyes fixed on the child. Scarlet, rust and copper, colour flickering about its body in an aura. Kumar could feel the beat of its heart, could hear it echoing like a drum, the pulse of its desire. Serene, the little boy, staring up at the demon and holding out a hand – a welcome. A gift. The demon moved closer, burning and aching to touch the boy, to take – what? What was the child offering? But the demon railed, drawing away again, regaining the strength to resist the child's temptation. Further, further from the boy, until, like a lamp, it flared and consumed itself, vanishing from the night.

From Bethlehem, a group of men approached, shouting and brandishing swords and staves. The servants looked to Melchior, ready to draw their own weapons but he shook his head.

"Kumar," he said quietly. "Attend to Balthazar."

Kumar went to the wasted, weeping man upon the ground. Blood and urine soaked his robe. His breath was slow and uneven. Kumar knelt beside him, brushing the wisps of hair from his face. He took his water skin from his belt, and tipped a little into Balthazar's mouth.

"He's dying," he said. Melchior squatted beside him. The men from Bethlehem closed in around them.

"Where is my son?" The man from the house stepped forward, his voice

fierce. But the little boy went to Balthazar and pressed his hands upon the man's face, on the torn, erupting skin. The spirit moved, like a sigh, healing the body. The skin smoothed over. The mouths of the sores closed and sank away. Balthazar took a breath and opened his eyes.

In the cool of the evening, threads of cloud rested upon the horizon, lavender above the dark purple mass of the land. The men ate well. Kumar reclined, in a flowering sense of well being. Balthazar laughed and drank. Already he was gaining flesh again, feasting on roast lamb, yoghurt and mint, fresh figs and dates, and the rich, sweet wine they bought in skins from the villages. Soon he would fill out to his former proportions. Only the white in his hair and the snapped front teeth still marked him out.

The zither twanged.

In the mouth of the tent, Kumar was sitting beside Melchior, who rattled the priest's fingerbones among the others in his painted cup.

"Joseph said he would take the child into Egypt," Melchior said. "Who knows what Herod will do?"

In the wake of the healing, the men had lowered their weapons, allowing Melchior and Balthazar to leave. And the child smiled at Kumar, drawing out the fear like a thorn. Kumar, the unwanted boy, sold for a handful of coins.

Melchior cast the bones upon the ground, scrutinized the knots and gaps.

"What do you see?" the boy asked. Melchior furrowed his brow.

"Killing," he said. "The slaughter of children. Herod is afraid." He gathered up the bones, and his hands trembled.

"We'll soon be home, Kumar. Do you want to return to your village? To your family?"

"I don't have a family," Kumar answered stonily, kicking at the dust with his toes. So Melchior reached out his arms and pressed the boy to his body. Through the heavy fabric of the robes, Kumar felt the flat, fallen breasts against his cheek.

"Kumar," Melchior said. "Why are you weeping? I may yet conceive. You think me too old? Balthazar is whole again. And marked by the demon and the spirit, what manner of child might he beget? Come with me to

Persia, to the palaces, to the colleges of astronomy and natural philosophy."

Kumar considered the prospect of this unholy family.

Outside, in the skirts of the gathering night, Balthazar laughed by the fire and the young man started to sing.



Sarah Singleton's one previous story for *Interzone* was "Cassilago's Wife" (issue 137). She lives in Chippenham, Wiltshire.

If there's a single plotline to the development of popular cinema in the 1990s, it's been the increasing inextricability of films from their marketing. Films that make most money do so not from the box-office takings but from the merchandising rights; this encourages a kind of film that lends itself optimally to cross-media transfer, and whose promotion is itself part of the product. To call this material "hype" is to miss the point, particularly if the term is dismissively meant. It's no longer really possible to pretend that large studio releases are vacuum-packed texts, irrespective of whether the movies have tangible spinoffs. Marketing campaigns, pre-publicity, the way films position and sell themselves are increasingly part of the text, especially in cases where this focusing of audience expectations fundamentally determines the experience of the product.

The eerily profitable *Sixth Sense* has a real problem here, as its plot is built on two revelations that are supposed to whack you like a stake through the forehead. The first comes halfway through, but is already revealed in the trailer (with the help of one of the two key scenes from the final minutes), so I trust it's okay to talk about openly: the disturbed little boy with whom saintly kid-shrink Bruce Willis is working is only disturbed because he's able to see the unquiet dead. The second comes at the very end, but is so thumpingly, beached-whale obvious from the opening minutes that anyone who knows there's a twist at the end (ie everyone except the brain-dead, the press-show audience, and those wandering in on day release from a closed monastic order) will see it coming with the awful inextricability of a dental appointment. Nevertheless, we're supposed not to talk about it, so I leave it to the reader to work it smugly out from clues already provided. (I simply add that it really is the obvious twist, no matter how clichéd or nonsensical it seems, particularly to anyone acquainted with the filmwriting canon of *Brmmph Jnngh Rggghbnngh okay*.)

The trouble is that, once stripped of its surprises, *The Sixth Sense* stands exposed as a remarkably unremarkable movie that has to hobble lamely around with a big steel plot bolt through both ankles. Some of the difficulties are merely structural: sedately paced as it is, with technical sleights at the heart of the plot inhibiting the development of a sustained narrative line, it tends to come over as a series of index-card scenes arranged in a very loose shuffle that has spilled quite a lot on the floor. (Presumably there was once a draft of the script that revealed what was in the locked cupboard, or the significance

# MUTANT POPCORN

Nick Lowe



of the "missed" first appointment.) For closely related reasons, there are also limits on how good the performances can be. Haley Joel Osment is terrific, but everyone else underused, in part because the demands of the plot severely restrict what scenes they can actually play. Even Willis, though adequately restrained, is miscast and far from his best even without the constraints of plot on his overall role and performance.

The best thing about *Sixth Sense* is the way it captures from the parental vantage the familial tension and anxiety surrounding a disturbed child. Unfortunately, this is precisely what the central premise brutally slashes to bits in a fatal string of serial copouts: (i) the disturbances are real, and external; (ii) the Halloween ghosties with their slit throats and open wounds to the head aren't really nasty, but just want to be *helped*; (iii) all have simple, single needs to which even a child can

play therapist, usually involving telling someone they love them and "were never second ever." This isn't merely grisly, but completely at odds with the setup that leads towards this convenient resolution. We're not told, for example, who needs to be hugged to exorcise the century-old judicial executions in the schoolhouse, and the hug'n'heal gospel is particularly whiffy in view of the telling fact that every single death in the film, without exception, turns out to be someone's *fault*. It could possibly be argued that the contradiction is in the cultural and narrative construction of therapy itself rather than anything in this actual film, but I'm not sure that's any excuse. A particularly gruesome piece of Hollywood affirmation is the manifestation of psychic reintegration in our lad's developing his thespian career by taking the lead in the school play, as the young Arthur pulling the sword from the stone – a very modern kind of role, as it seems to consist of brandishing a weapon impressively without attempting any actual lines. (The progress from upset child to action hero to beatific instant therapist is of course mirrored in another element of the movie, but only a longtime Willis-watcher would be so churlish.)

The embeddedness of film is the ultimate key to the *Blair Witch Project* phenomenon: a film so minimal as to be barely there at all, sustained entirely on a raft of well-nurtured audience expectations and a vast, relentlessly dreary network of supporting documyth. The choice of genre is both the key and the curse here, since ghost stories are the one genre where least is most: where it's possible to leave almost everything to the work of the audience's imagination. A besetting problem with filming the great supernatural stories has always been that they transfer extremely poorly if at all to show-don't-tell media like film, with its cult of the money shot and of getting it all up on screen. It's hard to imagine a film as creatively oblique as *Blair Witch* ever being made with a proper budget, and I don't think anyone would feel that its few cheesy attempts at spooky FX (especially the amateurish sound) count among the stronger elements. This is borne out by the web-based rush, long before release and not all at the instigation of the makers and their chums, to fill the open spaces in and around the text with site after site of tiresomely detailed and relentlessly unimaginative bolt-on mythology, all of which simply exposes the flimsiness of the premise and plot for all their undeniable bravura in execution.

But of course it's precisely this mass



willingness to fill the manger with stories about and outside the film itself that established the *Project's* unique selling base independently of the normal studio marketing processes (deft though Artisan's handling of these has been). In effect, it's the first movie to have allowed its consumers to erect their own platform of hype. It's an undeniably clever and likeable little movie, despite plot holes agape, an overextended middle more evocative of bad holidays than of life-threatening terror, and a very disappointingly rushed ending that muffs opportunity in plumping for vivid surprise over well-wrung suspense. As a radical new kind of film event unlikely to be easily replicated, it's a fascinating one-off, and brilliantly diagnostic and exploitative of the changing nature of media hype. (Anyone who actually believes this the scariest thing ever needs badly to get out more.) But the larger the *Project* gets, the slighter its foundations seem.

As post-product and meta-product become more and more integral to the modern movie *Gestaltwerk*, so pre-product becomes more expendable. Somewhere in a ditch alongside the three-quarters-crazed *John Carpenter's Vampires* lie the remains of an unreadable schlock-pulp novel (John Steakley's *Vampire\$*), from which Carpenter's screenwriter Don Jakoby has sucked a couple of ideas for set-pieces and the enjoyable premise of a mercenary platoon of contract vampire killers employed by the Vatican to cleanse the southwestern states of the undead. These vital juices extracted, the novel's desiccated corpse has been sensibly left to rot in the desert sun; and the movie instead raises the concept several levels by making the whole setup a centuries-old Romish conspiracy to clean up after the embarrassing secret that the Catholic Church inadvertently created vampires in the first place back in 1340 by a botched "kinda reverse exorcism." But who is the unidentified traitor to Christ and Pontiff who has secretly sold his soul to the ur-vampire antichrist? There's no shortage of unlikely suspects high in the credits who survive more than ten minutes of movie: it might be Maximilian Schell, or maybe Maximilian Schell, or possibly even Maximilian Schell. You'll just have to watch to find out the answer to this tantalizing brain-teaser.

Despite the ominously reputation-trading title (a devalued brand after *John Carpenter's Escape from LA*), *Vampires* turns out average-or-better JC, from the deep-purple band of his spectrum. Carpenter is always at his best when his ideas are closest to derangement, and high religion reli-

ably brings out his bounciest. He hasn't made a completely bonkers film since 1995's *In the Mouth of Madness*, and *Vampires* offers plentiful reassurance that the old fruitcake hasn't lost his ability to lose it. Misogynistic to the point of what one fervently hopes is parody, it features a lead performance by James Woods (wearing his cigar like an unzipped fly) so full-blooded it threatens aneurism, and a gleefully southern and blue-collar score by a band called the Toad Lickers pitting the director/composer on keyboards & rhythm against Steve Cropper (we're not worthy!!) on lead. All the same, it's wise to incorporate its authorship in the very product labelling, targeting itself specifically at those who know and feel comfortable with what a *John Carpenter's* movie ought to be. A frame-by-frame identical film substituting, say, *Jane Campion's* would be a very different, though perhaps no less enticing, proposition.

Nevertheless, for intelligent, thought-provoking cinema about science and humanity you probably need to look elsewhere. *Deep Blue Sea* turns the searching moral and intellectual spotlight we've come to expect from a Renny Harlin film on the question, "Should science pursue a cure for Alzheimer's if the ethical price is harvesting the vaccine from the brains of super-intelligent sharks who will go bloodily amok, trap you in the bottom level of your isolated deepwater research facility, and hunt you down and pick you off as you try to make it up to the surface?" Lest cynical doubters suspect that the fervent debates about international genotech conventions are merely a pretext for subsequent fun & splatter, a carefully-positioned newspaper photo of Iris Murdoch and John Bayley establishes the fundamental humanitarian goals behind triune bitch-babe-boffin Saffron Burrows' clandestine programme (in Samuel Jackson's words:) "to take God's greatest killing machine and give him will and desire" – a mission which so perfectly resembles a pitch for a movie as almost to amount to coincidence.

You know where you are with deep-sea sf jeopardy movies, and *Deep Blue Sea* is such a lean and purposeful specimen of the genre that no lover of pure form over content could possibly come away unfulfilled. All your favourite scenes are there, from going back for the pet (non-lethal, as usual) or the data (tut) to the intricately-concocted pretext for the heroine to strip down to her undies out of her skin-tight rubber suit. No time is lost whitening the station crew down to the obligatory six, or in determining an order of expendability for acts 2 and 3. (Cheekily, one of the designated sur-

vivors then gets eaten by surprise in mid-sentence as punishment for having just delivered the silliest monologue in the entire film, but things settle comfortably down thereafter.) Every available wall is helpfully labelled and cross-referenced to the abundant large-scale plot maps of what must be the most extensively-signposted marine genetics lab in ichthyological history ("Caution: Seal Door After Exit And Entering!") "Notice: Keep This Passageway Clear!" "Heavy Weather Fuel Shut Down!" &c., &c., &c.).

Inevitable intertextual japes with *Jaws* abound, and LL Cool J's movie-stealing star turn is rewarded by being allowed to compose and perform the most absurd end-title rap song in movie history ("The killer's cold-blooded/The corridors are flooded," and so on past all limits of known enjoyment). For those who've seen all the other films it throws into the tank and picks clean, this is genre cinema stripped down by razor teeth to a gleaming skeleton of game architecture: a film that mimics the sleek grace of nature's greatest predator, feeding gorily on its own kind in a pattern of behaviour that looks for all the world like human intelligence. But don't be fooled. It's only after blood.

Nick Lowe

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# A CHRISTMAS CAVIL OR, IT'S A PLUNDERFUL LIFE

Gary Westfahl

If we seek to define those works belonging to the genre of the Christmas story – and surely, such stories are numerous and distinctive enough to warrant the term “genre” – there are two obvious characteristics: the story takes place on or around Christmas, and the story is promulgated, absorbed, and revived only during the Christmas season.

However, while these are *necessary* conditions for texts in the genre, they are not *sufficient* conditions. Consider the films *Holiday Inn* and *Home Alone*. Both stories take place primarily or exclusively at Christmas time, both were released during the holiday season, and both appear on television every year around December. Yet it is difficult to regard these films as Christmas stories; somehow, there is something insufficiently *Christmassy* about them.

For a work to truly be a Christmas story, another condition must be met: the story is *about* Christmas; it takes the holiday itself as its main subject (as *Holiday Inn* and *Home Alone* do not). One can go further: the story is a *defence* of Christmas, of the spirit of kindness and generosity associated with the holiday. So the Christmas story will often involve a characteristic plot: someone who is not being nice enough during the Christmas season learns his lesson and starts behaving like a fine fellow.

As another distinguishing trait, the Christmas story frequently approaches or intersects with fantasy. While ghosts (as in Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*) are uncommon, celebration of a Christian holiday invites the appearance of angels, and the figure of Santa Claus, with elves and flying reindeer, may also move the story into the realm of fantasy. Even Christmas stories without fantastic elements can mimic the structure and atmosphere of fairy tales, as numerous examples illustrate.

If Christmas stories are defined as defences of the Christmas spirit, a surprising corollary emerges: stories about the first Christmas, when Jesus was born, are not true Christmas stories – because, whatever worthwhile messages are conveyed, these stories rarely focus specifically on the need to be kind

and generous. The origins of the Christmas genre lie in more recent times. A naïve person would start the search in the era when the custom of Christmas gift-giving first became ubiquitous; a cynical person would begin when there first emerged businesses dependent upon holiday purchases motivated by this generosity and thus interested in promoting a form of literature to stimulate such purchases. Both searchers would end up in 19th-century Europe; and while other works from that era might be advanced as generic prototypes, the story that most served to define and establish the form is *A Christmas Carol*.

Dickens's story can be interpreted as an extended response to the question, “Why should people be kind to each other?” The four ghosts each provide a different answer to the question, in increasing order of importance.

Marley's Ghost reminds people that kindness to others may be mandated by both law and custom, and Scrooge violated British law and custom in his shameful treatment of a business partner. But this message, like Marley's Ghost himself, is merely an introductory flourish, a point that should be made but not one important to Dickens. His substantive defences of Christmas will invoke more universal principles.

The Ghost of Christmas Past presents the *genetic defence* of altruism: human beings are born naturally kind, so kindness is our characteristic behaviour. But some people, due to unfortunate experiences, have been driven away from their true nature. The Ghost of Christmas Past drives the message home by forcing Scrooge to examine his younger self: look, you weren't always this mean person; you were once rather nice. That's the way you were born, and the way you should be.

The Ghost of Christmas Present offers the *therapeutic defence* of altruism: being nice to other people makes you *feel good*; improving others' lives improves your own life. Scrooge learns this by observing the family of Bob Cratchit: according to the precepts of capitalism, Scrooge should be happy, since he has plenty of money, while the Cratchits should be miserable, since they have little money. But

Scrooge notes that the Cratchits are a pretty contented bunch – and crippled Tiny Tim, who should be the most miserable, curiously is the happiest of them all, because he is the kindest person in a family of kind people.

While these episodes begin to melt Scrooge's cold heart, he changes his selfish ways only after the visit of the Ghost of Christmas Future, who unveils Dickens's final defence of altruism, the *immortality defence*: humans live on after death only in the minds of their compatriots; if you are not nice to other people, they will not remember you, and you will be erased from the pages of history. To endure, you must be kind, so your contemporaries and descendants will remember you. This is what Scrooge learns from contemplating his unattended funeral and ignored grave; and it is to avoid this fate that he becomes a profligate philanthropist, smiling at everyone while purchasing that goose for a generous Christmas feast.

If this brilliant story is rarely appreciated, it is a matter of inappropriate context: placed next to Dickens's other novels or classics of British literature, *A Christmas Carol* indeed seems puerile. However, considered in the context of a genre which necessarily presents a puerile message about the need for kindness, *A Christmas Carol* emerges as not only the template of the Christmas story but its most comprehensive and profound exemplar. While many successors crudely parrot its appeals to human nature and therapeutic benefits in defending altruism, few venture as close to the grave as Dickens does, and the electrifying chill of that visit to Scrooge's dismal future gives his Christmas story unparalleled depth and substance.

In the century following *A Christmas Carol*, the story of the mean person who learns better at Christmas time became ubiquitous, but one memorable Christmas story, O. Henry's “The Gift of the Magi,” strikingly inverts the formula. Two people, already generous to a fault, learn the necessity of selfishness: if either or both had acted selfishly, they would have been better off; their simultaneous decision to be generous beyond measure led to their ruin. The lingering prominence of the story suggests some subterranean dissatisfaction with Dickens's message, a sense that boundless generosity is perhaps not the panacea proffered by the relentless promoters of Christmas. But the clearest rebuttal to Dickens comes in the only story that approaches *A Christmas Carol* in stature and profundity, which is a film called *It's a Wonderful Life*.

Others have noted a relationship between Dickens's novel and Frank Capra's movie, but it is far from

derivative; in fact, *It's a Wonderful Life* is stunningly original because it simultaneously incorporates, expands upon, and refutes *A Christmas Carol*, along with all other Christmas stories.

The parallels between Dickens and Capra can be stated as follows: both stories feature a man who, on Christmas Eve, vocally challenges the true meaning of Christmas. He receives a supernatural visitor intent upon changing his attitude. To demonstrate that the man has gone astray, the story examines his past, his present predicament, and a possible situation. Anxious to prevent the possible situation from occurring, the man returns to present-day reality as an enthusiastic proponent of the Christmas spirit. This artfully worded summary conceals a few differences in the stories, but the overall similarities are inarguable.

The film significantly departs from Dickens's story in only two respects. First, while Dickens links Scrooge and Cratchit only when the Ghost of Christmas Present visits, contrasting Cratchit's contented family with Scrooge's loneliness, *It's a Wonderful Life* maintains a connection throughout its story between its malign Scrooge figure, Potter, and its likable Cratchit figure, George Bailey. Second, Capra makes Cratchit the main character, an amicable person driven by desperation to question everything he values in life. This makes the challenge to Christmas more threatening, since denunciations of the holiday are now attributed to a character we love and admire, but the full, devastating impact of this shift on any effort to uphold Christmas values cannot be appreciated until the film ends.

Despite Cratchit's enlarged role, *It's a Wonderful Life* remains Scrooge's story as well – and, considered as such, the film's darkness becomes apparent, since it is nothing less than the unsettling saga of a triumphantly unrepentant Scrooge.

In the beginning, like Scrooge, Potter commits a crime – grand larceny, no less – by seizing and concealing the \$3,000 that he knows belongs to Bailey's bank. Though Scrooge goes unpunished for cheating Marley, at least Marley's Ghost appears to upbraid him and make him feel a little guilty. But nobody upbraids Potter, and he never displays any guilt about his theft. So, while *A Christmas Carol* presents kindness as something that law and custom endeavour to enforce, that notion here is even more powerfully brushed aside as idealistic and irrelevant; instead, *It's a Wonderful Life* shows that rich people can get away with cruel crimes without fear of punishment. In the meantime, it is gentle, law-abiding Bailey who faces

possible imprisonment because of Potter's crime, further demonstrating that law and custom don't support kindness very well.

During Bailey's past, Potter is always the same – mean, manipulative, avaricious. Bailey's father explains him as a "sick man," but Potter surely makes it hard to contend that people are naturally kindhearted. Bailey's history undermines the argument more subtly: yes, he does kind deeds, but it is always something he feels *obliged* to do, not something he *wants* to do, and it is usually something that harms him – due to kindness, he loses his hearing, college education, and honeymoon. Bailey suggests not that humans are intrinsically generous, but that they are indoctrinated by society to act generously, even when it is contrary to their own desires and interests. This is not exactly a ringing endorsement of the quintessential love in everyone's hearts that Christmas is supposed to bring out.

In Bailey's present, Potter is sitting pretty, since the stolen \$3,000 may finally allow him to crush Bailey's competing bank and control the entire town. If he feels sad about his lonely, unfulfilled life, there is not an instant in the film that conveys that. Rather, the unfailingly generous George Bailey is angry and bitter; though surrounded by his family on Christmas Eve, like Cratchit, the presence of his family is only irksome. Cruelty is making Potter happy, while kindness is making Bailey miserable.

The alternate world to which Bailey is taken by his guardian angel, where he was never born, is also a world without Potter; although Gloria Grahame ad-libbed the line "I know Potter" while being arrested, the script doesn't mention him at all, and it is entirely possible that he has died, or has left to find new towns to conquer. But unlike Scrooge, he is hardly forgotten: Bedford Falls has been renamed Pottersville in his honour; other landmarks like the housing development Potter's Field commemorate him, and the town has become precisely the sort of place that an ambitious capitalist would dream of: neon signs, thriving businesses, and frenetic commercial activity everywhere.

While Frank Capra despises, and wishes audiences to despise, Pottersville and everything it represents, that city clearly represented, even in 1946, what the Western world was inexorably becoming, thanks to the greed and ambition of businessmen like Potter. In the context of American history, this tableau of conquering capitalism refutes Dickens's assertion that kind people are remembered, while mean people are forgotten. Quite the contrary: the names of many wonderfully nice

people in 19th-century America are utterly unknown, but monuments and institutions still bear the names of savagely acquisitive robber barons like Carnegie and Rockefeller. Further, in the context of the film's echoes of Dickens, we are invited to view this scene not as an alternate world but as the future of Bedford Falls: eventually, Bailey's futile efforts against Potter will falter, and Potter will take over the town to remake it in his image.

Yet the film's happy ending, with Bedford Falls restored to its pastoral ambience and Bailey rescued from disgrace by his friends' generosity, apparently indicates that the Potters of the world can be resisted and put in their place. Or does it? First consider precisely what it is that makes Bailey so happy: a growing pile of money in his house. Whatever the logic of the narrative suggests, the scene functions as a giddy visual celebration of pure, unadulterated greed.

Also consider the only thing that has really changed by the end of the film: Potter is \$3,000 richer, while Bailey's friends are \$3,000 poorer. After Christmas is over and accounts are settled, Bailey will return to the daily struggle of opposing Potter not one whit stronger than he was before. Since the film does not challenge or transform Potter, as Dickens challenged and transformed Scrooge, he remains a powerful evil force; all the film does is to needlessly reprimand an essentially good man who is experiencing an understandable temporary bout of anger and depression while ignoring the true villain of the piece. This is the masterstroke of the film's conclusion: instead of bringing Potter onstage to be chastised or punished, *It's a Wonderful Life* lets him be, suggesting that mean people like Potter can never be reformed or defeated; at best, they can be ignored and occasionally thwarted. Thus, the final scene both validates Potter's values and implicitly licenses Potter's behaviour.

So, if you watch *It's a Wonderful Life* this holiday season, enjoy it as a bracing antidote to the treacly sentiments of *Christmas Carol* adaptations and other Christmas stories; revel in its thinly veiled argument against the Christmas spirit. Kindness is not enforced by law and custom; kindness is not intrinsic to human nature; kindness does not make people happy; and kindness does not make people immortal. Go ahead and swindle your partner, steal a few thousand dollars, launch underhanded schemes to destroy your opponents. It is the way that residents of Pottersville are supposed to behave.

And have a Merry Christmas.

Gary Westfahl

# The Unthinkables

*Liz Williams*

Ghiru waited out on the ledge until the wind turned red, but there was still no sign of Hassia. He shivered as the wind changed; it carried four kinds of dust, powdered rusty with iron from the distant northern deserts and a stray coil of star vine, which it bowled along the platform like a departing soul. Ghiru gave a whistling sigh. The rust-red wind changed direction, veering around to the west where the light lay golden as an eye over Khaikhurriyë. Behind him, the domes of the temenos were dark against the sunset sky: absorbing the last of the light. Ghiru's skin prickled as an anxious voice sent from inside the temenos. The voice sent: *is there any sign of our sister?* And Ghiru replied: *there is no sign. Not yet.*

He waited until the light deepened and died, taking his hope with it. The lamps began to come on across the vast span of the city: glowing like embers through the dusk. The first stars shimmered out and Ghiru recognized the planets Irhë and Seress, almost at conjunction. His spir-its lifted momentarily at the sight of a figure trudging up the steps that led from the well-platform, but it was not his sister, only a hirei walking wearily homeward. It conveyed an air of resignation, of duty carried long. Its four spindly arms were jointed tightly around its sides; its back was bent. Ghiru, his hopes fading, watched the hirei until it passed out of sight, and then he turned and went slowly back inside the walls of the temenos.

IrEthiverris was waiting outside the meeting room, sitting grumpily with his back to the broad, warm wall. The look he gave Ghirubennin spoke volumes, and all his quills were flattened against his narrow head. *This is all your fault*, the look said, though IrEthiverris at least had the grace not to let any stray expressives loose into the air. Ghiru's mouth tightened and his eyes grew orange and round. He whistled at length.

"No doing of mine."

"Whose is it, then?" IrEthiverris muttered. "You are the first of the clan; Hassia is your responsibility. To lose your sister like this! What a family!"

This was the trouble with guests, always criticizing, always telling you what you were doing wrong. There was only one of IrEthiverris, and a great many of the Es Moyshekhali, so of course Ghiru took pains to be polite,

but there were limits. Then IrEthiverris opened his mouth and emitted a shrill wail.

"Are you all right?" Ghiru asked in concern. If the Es Moyshekhali's guest fell ill, or started dreaming or something, the clan would never live it down. The old man did not reply. "Please," Ghiru said, unnerved. "We have problems enough."

He opened the manifold of the meeting room. The clan were in a tense and silent uproar. A wall of uncensored pheromonal expressives, so strong that it was almost palpable, floated out into the hallway. Ghiru clapped his hands to the sides of his face.

"Please be quiet! I can't feel myself think."

"She has been missing for over two days now! We must alert someone!" It was a younger member of the clan who spoke, but his siblings rattled their quills in sympathetic agitation.

"No," Ghiru said. "We have not lost Hassia. We know very well where she is." He paused to let the impact of this sink in.

"The Unthinkables?" someone faltered.

"Where else?" Warily, Ghiru went to take his accustomed place on the floor. The living, growing warmth beneath his bare feet comforted him. He had been expecting such a problem ever since the first signs of Hassia's madness, but he had not wanted to acknowledge the full extent of the situation. Members of a high-caste clan such as the EsMoyshekhali just didn't go mad. It was not, of course, unthinkable, but it was a notion that brought deep discomfort in its wake. The problem had started some weeks ago, although now that he looked back Ghiru realized that Hassia had always been a little – detached. She had endured a harder Making than the rest of them, too. Sometimes he'd caught her watching other members of the clan with a curious expression, somewhere between amusement and anger, in her golden eyes.

Usually, Hassia kept her thoughts to herself, but recently Ghiru had the impression that she had simply ceased to care about guarding her expressives. Take last month, for example. The Making ceremony for an infant of the Marginals was no place to start meditating upon bizarre notions. Ghiru's quills shivered with mortification at the memory. The EsMoyshekhali – all the desqu-



sai clans, for that matter – regarded such an august event as a Making with deep and sombre solemnity, but there was Hassia, clearly bored, thinking all sorts of things and not even bothering to hide them. The thoughts were forbidden ones, and they made Ghiru's head pound with pain as the epistemics clamped down. Despite his discomfort, however, Ghiru had hastily covered Hassia's tracks, and he did not think that the khaithoi presiding over the occasion had noticed where such immoderate concepts were emanating from. Now, it seemed, he was wrong. The idea of Hassia being with the Unthinkables made him shiver.

"Listen," he tried to reassure the rest of the clan. "Try not to worry. Tomorrow, I will make enquiries."

"And if she is indeed with the Unthinkables?" a fearful voice said.

Ghiru forced his quills to lie flat. "Then I will bring her home and we'll cure her. That's that. And now I'm going to bed."

He stood up in a turmoil of silence, and left the room before anyone could ask anything more.

He made his way up to the sleeping nest and stretched out on the floor, letting its warmth reassure him and listening to the subliminal greensong hum of the temenos as it so slowly grew. He remembered his last conversation with Hassia, so short a time ago. He could remember the words she had used, but not the sense which accompanied them; he had not understood what she said then, and he did not understand it now. He repeated the words to himself, turning them over in his mind, trying to force meaning into them, but none came.

*"Why should the khaithoi and the Marginals dictate our lives, Ghiru? Wouldn't you like to be able to think whatever you pleased?" She had reached out and taken his wrist, turning it over to display the small bump of his monthly epistemic implant.*

*"I don't understand. How is it that you can think such things, Hassia? Are you behind on your dose?" Ghiru had protested. She had glanced at him, sadly.*

*"Doesn't it ever occur to you that we don't need epistemics? Either enhancers or suppressants? That we can think perfectly well without them? I think I can, Ghiru. I've been taking suppressants all my life, and I don't think they've ever really worked. But you know, I sometimes wonder whether some people simply don't want to think, because it makes them uncomfortable. You should listen to the mad, Ghiru. They're the only ones speaking meaningfully these days." Ghiru had stared at her, filled with sudden foreboding. The thoughts pained him; lancing through his linguistic cortex like lightning.*

*"Hassia, if you start feeling – not well, you will tell me, won't you?" But she had not replied.*

Next morning, Ghiru rose from the coil of bodies and walked stealthily to the door. To his dismay, IrEthiverris was still sitting outside the meeting room, but then he saw that the old man had merely fallen asleep. Ghiru was relieved to feel that IrEthiverris was dreaming along with the rest of the clan: he wouldn't put it past their

guest to begin imagining something different. Perhaps this side of the family was where Hassia got it from... He stood looking down at the old man with mingled exasperation and affection, and then IrEthiverris woke up.

"Where are you going?" the old man demanded loudly.

"To the Unthinkables' Quarter," Ghiru hissed. "To find Hassia."

"I hope you're wearing your scale, then."

"Of course I'm wearing my scale. What, do you think I'd go out half dressed?" He gave a small grimace, hoping that the modifications he had made to the scale would hold up.

"I hear tell that madness can be catching," IrEthiverris said, and cackled.

Ghiru sighed. The old man went on: "Mad people don't like scale. They want to know what you're thinking, like the khaithoi do. I hope you're not planning to speak to the khaithoi, too. They'll make you shed your scale, all right. Can't have secrets in front of your betters, you know. This temenos will go to seed before the day comes when khaithoi let you conceal your thoughts."

"I'm not planning to see the khaithoi today," Ghiru patiently informed IrEthiverris.

"You never know," the old man replied darkly.

Once outside the temenos, Ghiru paused only to double-check the setting on his scale and snatch a drink from the symbiotic singing vine which coiled across the wall. He took a deep breath of smoky morning air and set off in the direction of the Unthinkables' Quarter. He took a circuitous route, and tried to remain as inconspicuous as possible, just to be on the safe side. One never knew who might decide to report back to the Marginals and buy up some status. The very thought of visiting people who were insane made him nervous. *They say madness is catching.*

A barge was waiting at the edge of Khattuyë Dock. Ghiru stepped aboard. The barge was already full, but a number of lower-caste people rose to let Ghiru sit down. He thanked them absently, and tried not to notice as they stared at him. He supposed it was a novelty to see someone from such an elevated position using public transport, and smiled, wondering what they would do if a khaithoi should ever deign to step on board. Jump in the airstream, probably. He did a quick inventory of the castes on the barge: *sohrei*, *shu'yss*, *mharu*. No one who was capable of holding a conversation with him. If they even tried to speak to one another, Ghiru reflected, each would sound as mad as Hassia. He was glad that the scale filtered out the feel of the conversation of the lesser castes, though he had to admit that the rush and hiss of the passengers' words as they disambiguated their speech was curiously soothing. At least he didn't have to admit to the shame of where he was going.

Eventually the barge glided up to Zhuriyu Ledge and Ghiru stepped out. The Unthinkables' Quarter stretched below.

Ghiru had not realized that the Quarter was so large. The mad were confined to the dead zone of the city; to those temeni which had already seeded and lost their clans. A wasteland of sagging, shattered domes extended as far as the oily line of the ocean. The air smelled of

decay, old spores and dust. Further along the line of the coast, a more complex concentration of dark red domes blotted out the sea and memory tugged at Ghiru: once, this had been the temenos of one of the jharu clans, before the caste had been terminated by the Marginals. Not a fortunate omen. Taking a deep breath, Ghiru left the ledge and made his way down the slope towards the perimeter wall and the entry platform.

The wall was sealed. Ghiru stepped back and studied it for a moment, then sent a hopeful instruction. Might as well try with the basics.

*/inside?/*

The wall remained as stubbornly closed as a disapproving mouth, its high curved surface prickling with distaste. Ghiru cajoled, ordered and pleaded with it for a while longer, but the wall stayed shut. Time to try more unorthodox methods, Ghiru thought. He reached beneath the wide, loose collar of his robe and adjusted the scale implant, feeling the sudden cool flush of the scale over his skin as it changed. Ghiru took a deep breath and allowed himself one or two very careful emotions: */pleasure at weather /indifference to the situation/*.

These were picked up by the filter of the scale, modified according to his prior specifications, and amplified out towards the wall. Ghiru stood on the entry platform, as nonchalantly as he could manage, and let his clothes deceive the wall. It was fortunate, he reflected bitterly, that Hassia came from a clan which could afford such expenses, and not from one of the poorer families. He tried to suppress the rush of satisfaction as a small slit appeared and the side of the wall manifolded back to let him in. Ghiru stepped quickly through before it had a chance to change its mind.

Once inside, he found himself in a bleak courtyard before one of the ruined temeni. An Unthinkable was staring at him in horror. She raised her hands and fluttered her fingers; her quills rose at the back of her head.

"The khaithoi didn't bring you here. How did you get in?"

"Sorry to alarm you. My clothes lied to your house."

The little Unthinkable blinked. "How daring," she said, uncertainly. "You're wearing scale? I'm afraid you'll have to deactivate it in this quarter. We have no secrets from one another here."

Ghiru touched the implant, turning it to a lower setting without deactivating it. He hoped the Unthinkable wasn't sufficiently sensitive to tell, but he was determined not to walk among these people without some degree of protection. Warily, he kept his receptors open for any peculiar concepts that might drift in his direction, but so far the Unthinkable's thoughts seemed quite clear.

"There," the Unthinkable said. "Isn't that better?"

Without giving him time to reply she led him through into an inner courtyard. The Unthinkables were gathered around an infant, which lay whistling on someone's lap. Everyone turned and stared at Ghiru. He searched the assembled faces, but Hassia was not among them.

"You've come to join us?" someone asked hopefully. The air was awash with conflicting expressives: */pleasure /anxiety /astonishment/*. Ghiru found it hard to think in such a tumult. He said, "I'm afraid not. I'm looking for

someone. My sister. Hassia írShira EsMosyehkhal."

"We don't use locatives here," a voice said reprovingly. "We have dispensed with status. With us, everyone has the same address, modified for differentiation by a random numeral. I am Nowhere One."

"I'm sorry. I should have realized."

"But we do know who you mean," Nowhere One said, and gave a sad, whistling sigh. "She was one of the new ones. One of the ones who was taken."

"Taken? By whom?"

"The khaithoi, who else? We were outside. We had gone to the Irriyēt canal, for pleasure, nothing more. Then some things came from the Marginals. The khaithoi, with their creatures – Pincers and Hunter-Maters. We ran, but some were caught."

"And what did you do then?"

"Do? What could we do? The khaithoi do as they please in the desqusai quarters, but we are forbidden to leave these few temeni, let alone visit the Marginals. We do not have the same caste status as you do. If we go there, we would be quarantined or killed. The khaithoi fear us; they say we are sick." The Unthinkable snorted. "Rank stupidity. Better they should fear the sickness inside the Marginals itself."

The words swam queasily within Ghiru's neural processes. Hastily, before more painful thoughts could be uttered, he said: "And you're sure that's where they were taken? They haven't been seen since?"

"No." */Sadness /fear /misery/* "Please go. You do not understand. We have nothing to say to one another."

Their thoughts were making his head hurt. "All right," Ghiru said, wearily. "Thank you. I'll go now."

"I can show you a safer way. Hunter-Maters patrol the perimeter."

Accompanied by Nowhere One, Ghiru walked back towards the perimeter wall. It was close to First Darkness now and a twilight haze was settling over the city. The mass of dead temeni seemed to weigh down the day, anchoring it in shadows. Something scuttled from a shattered building.

"What was that?" Ghiru hissed in alarm.

"Silence!" Nowhere One's eyes gleamed in the twilight. "Stand still. It is írHazh. A Scavenger. You're wearing scale; I can feel the blankness."

"Yes, but –"

"Turn it off. It won't touch us; it's modified to seek out the sane. Prevent you from getting out, once you've got in."

After a moment's hesitation, Ghiru did so. He could see the írHazh as it moved among the litter at the foot of the dead temenos, and it was bigger than he was. Pincers clicked. Nowhere One's hand was tight around his arm. The írHazh glided around the wall of the temenos and was gone.

Nowhere One's hand relaxed its grip. "Now go. Quickly."

Activating the scale, Ghiru ran to the wall and lied his way out. He did not look back. If Hassia was being held somewhere in the Marginals, he thought despairingly, then it would be little use for him to go there on his own. He would need to petition up through the caste hierar-

chy, until the khaithoi decided to consider the case. It could take months. There was a rattle at the back of his neck as his quills drooped in despair.

First Darkness was passing now, and the sunlight glistened deep and red across the walls of Fourth Quarter. And then a shadow fell across the sun. Ghiru glanced up. Two creatures stood in his path, blocking the way. Around him, people were quietly melting into the shadows, staying out of trouble. The creatures were tall and armoured: sunlight ran down their carapaces like water and their arms were folded in a complex insectoid huddle around their jointed waists. Their long, lantern-jawed faces were dark and grave. Ghiru swallowed fear. It seemed that a visit to the Marginals would not be such a lengthy procedure, after all.

Two hours later he was standing on the ledge before the entrance to the Marginals. Khaikurriyë spread below, all the way to the edge of the world, glittering in the red light of Rasasatra's sun. The city looked different, seen from so high up. Ghiru could see the tiny domes of Moyshekhali, no bigger than the heads of black pins and almost lost in the vastness of the desqusai quarter. His fingertips felt wet. He reached beneath his robes and wiped them against the shivering surface of the scale, change rippling over his skin as the scale fed back his own anxiety and neutralized it.

His escort conferred among themselves in chattering voices, then one of them leaned forwards and spoke softly to the wall of the Marginals. There was a long pause, and then a hiss as the manifold opened. Ghiru took a long breath and stepped inside. The manifold closed behind him and it took a moment for his eyes to adjust to the dimmer light. The living walls were inscribed with the unknown languages of the Marginals, changing as he watched. Uncertainly, Ghiru looked about him. At first he thought that there was no one there, but little by little he became aware that a pair of yellow eyes were watching him. The air shimmered with a haze like heat.

Ghiru bowed very low. A khaith stepped forth, plump features creased at its own little joke. Ghiru, annoyed, supposed that it must amuse the khaithoi to exploit their superior powers of communication.

"You see," the khaith said happily, using deliberately simple forms of language. "I tell you I am not present and you believe me!"

Ghiru sent a careful drift of expressives towards his hierarchical superior: */knowledge of place/respect/a touch of awe/*. He didn't want to overdo things, however, and so he straightened up. The khaith blinked once and said, "Your locative?"

"Ghiruiss írShiru EsMoyshekhali."

"Very well." The khaith did not, naturally enough, provide a locative in return. "Hold out your hand. We must check your quarantine levels. Step this way."

By now, Ghiru was seriously alarmed. People were not routinely invited into the Marginals, after all, and when they were it was for purposes that were almost uniformly sinister. His anxiety for his sister grew, and his skin became uncomfortably tight as the scale contracted, seal-

ing off words that should not be uttered and translating them into expressives of respect.

"You have recently taken your suppressants?" the khaith said.

"Yes, ten days ago."

The khaith's fleshy, four-petalled mouth curled out, then in again until the mouth was no more than a tiny round hole.

"You are wearing scale! Turn it off now so that the quarantine manifold may evaluate your condition." Ghiru did so.

"Now. You were seen illegally leaving a forbidden place: the Unthinkables' Quarter. For what reason?"

"A relative of mine recently disappeared," Ghiru explained. "I sought help in locating her."

"Knowing that she was mad?"

"I sought only to verify her revised status."

"You're lying."

"I hoped to persuade her to come home. I thought it might be possible to cure her," Ghiru said. "Then I was told that she had been brought here. I was wondering if your own august understanding might assist me?"

It seemed suddenly difficult to think clearly; Ghiru could feel a tugging sensation at the corners of his mind, as though he had forgotten something.

"What is the locative of your relative?"

Ghiru told him.

"These short little addresses," the khaith mused. "Still, they're easy to remember even if they're not very elegant... Naturally, one has never heard of her," it added with an air of finality. There was a long, taut pause.

"You feel?" the khaith said. "If she is here, then I cannot assist you. Moreover, we must settle a constriction upon your temenos for your trespassing and temerity. A higher dose of epistemics might be required."

"Indeed," Ghiru said hastily. An idea was forming in his mind; a notion that seemed entirely foreign to him. He had never entertained such a thought before, and the strangest thing about it was that the idea made no sense at all.

"Come with me," the khaith said. Ghiru followed it down a labyrinth of passages to an inner room, where four more of its kind sat. One of them had the scalp markings of a hierophant; the rest were clerks. The air of ennui was palpable.

"This citizen has transgressed," the khaith explained. "Trespass in the Unthinkables' Quarter. Quarantine has revealed nothing untoward. However, detention may be called for, to set an example." He sent something that Ghiru did not understand. The hierophant's petalled mouth emitted disambiguators. Ghiru strained to comprehend, but it was useless. The language used by the khaith was beyond his understanding. The hierophant reached out a sweaty palm.

"Give him your hand," the khaith said. "The hierophant in his mercy has decided on a minimal pheromonal marker; you will be ostracized for no more than a month."

Winced with distaste, Ghiru stepped forward and placed his own hand in that of the hierophant. There was a sudden tingling in his palm, like static. The hierophant jerked away. Its four stumpy hands vanished inside its

own robe and then it gasped. Dismay hit Ghiru like a wall of wet heat.

"I – what are you *thinking*, terrible person?" the hierophant wailed.

"Thinking?"

He was certainly thinking something, he realized. He could feel it, an entirely unfamiliar concept. It was emanating from the hierophant as well. In fact, everyone in the room was having the same thought. But what was it?

Ghiru suddenly remembered IrEthiverris' old voice. *I hear tell that madness can be catching.*

"Epistemic infection!" the khaith wailed, and backed away. The five khaithoi huddled together, chirring in confusion. Ghiru stared for a moment, and then a possibility dawned on him. Activating the scale, he turned and bolted down the corridor. *Hassia*. Whatever they did to him, this might be his only chance to find her. He ran through the maze of the Marginals, automatically seeking traces of her in the air, but of course there were none. The khaithoi would not risk infection by bringing in an uncontained prisoner, though it was possibly a little late for that now.

Ghiru had never been in the Marginals before, and he did not know the paths. He ran down corridors, scattering expressives so that he would be able to find his way back again. Startled faces seemed to peer out of the walls, reflected from the myriad temeni of the Marginals. Opening walls at random, Ghiru looked in and at last saw *Hassia*. She was struggling from a containment pod, along with other Unthinkables. Beside the pod, the guardian khaithoi swayed to and fro, its eyes glazed. Brushing past it, Ghiru and the Unthinkables ran until they came to a point where a familiar scent touched the air: Ghiru's own expressives, laid like a trail. At the end of the passageways lay the entrance to the Marginals. The doors manifolded open to let them pass and then they were out into the evening. Irhë and Seress lay low in the western sky.

Ghiru grasped his sister by the shoulders and turned her around. "*Hassia!* What happened?"

His sister was beaming. "You first."

Ghiru gave a brief account of recent events and *Hassia's* quills rattled with excitement. "The Unthinkables did it! They really did it. And you were the one with the new idea."

"What?"

"It was part of our plan. We knew someone would come looking for me, and we knew that person would go to the Unthinkables first. Then one of the Nowheres would persuade them to deactivate their scale, and infect them with the Idea. Then, sooner or later, that person would bring the Idea here; it was programmed to hide beneath their epistemic suppressants until it could be phrased in the khaithoi language, via their pheromones. We couldn't bring it ourselves; epistemic suppressants don't work with mad people. That's why we're mad, after all. You activated the Idea when you touched the khaith's hand." She hugged him affectionately.

Ghiru was aware of a tense and terrible misgiving.

"*Hassia. What was the idea?*"

"It's a recursive paradox. It's the thought that thought is not possible. The Unthinkables have been constructing it for over a year; they've had to import all sorts of pheromonal alternatives to get the right meme. We might be mad," *Hassia* added tartly, "but we're not stupid."

"I've infected the khaithoi with a recursive loop?" The thought made his head hurt.

"They won't be able to think about anything else. A philosophical trap. Unless they solve it, by which time we should have managed to change a few things on this world."

Ghiru gaped at her. She reached out and touched the implant with a fingertip; the scale hushed away across his skin.

"And then you won't be needing the epistemic suppressants any more." Ghiru tried to think of how this would be, but the ideas were too hard. "Don't worry," his sister said. "You'll get the idea eventually. Look."

She took his hand and turned, and they watched in silence as the lights which starred the immense domes of the Marginals began to flicker out, one by one.

Liz Williams's previous story for *Interzone* was "A Child of the Dead" (issue 123). She lives in Brighton and has published stories in a number of small-press magazines. Last year, one of her stories was taken for two best-of-the-year anthologies.

# interzone

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There are two ways to become a famous writer. One is to write the same sort of book over and over again, to be famous not for one particular book but rather for a style which is identifiably your own. This is the method of Graham Greene, Iris Murdoch, Patrick O'Brian, Stephen King – not to mention Agatha Christie, Barbara Cartland and Captain W. E. Johns. The method is annoyingly labour-intensive, but alas, for most writers it is the only option.

The other one, which depends almost entirely on luck, is to write just *one* book – *Gone With the Wind*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Watership Down* – which achieves such spectacular success that anything else you publish sells on the back of it, but even if you publish nothing else you'll still be famous anyway. (Mind you, if you *do* publish anything else, no one will think it is as good as your one seminal work.)

Among sf writers, few belong more firmly in the second category than William Gibson, whose 1980s instant classic *Neuromancer* is not only the most famous work of recent sf, but probably the most influential. "Cyberspace and virtual reality were invented in this book. It stands alongside 1984 (*sic*) and *Brave New World* as one of the twentieth century's most potent novels of the future," enthuses the blurb on the latest UK reprint.

The same shall hardly be said, I fear, of Gibson's new novel *All Tomorrow's Parties* (Viking, £16.99). The title – also used by Paul J. McAuley for a story in *Interzone* 119 – derives from a song on the classic *Velvet Underground and Nico* album of 1966 (the one with the Warhol banana on the front). The song – with Nico coming on like a cross between Leonard Cohen and latterday Marianne Faithfull – is a doom-laden dirge, but thrilling in its inventiveness and emotional depth. Gibson's novel is doom-laden too, but in the end merely depressing, reminding one not so much of Raymond Chandler – with whom Gibson is always compared – as of Samuel Beckett, with all the tedium but without the brevity.

No one can doubt that *Neuromancer* deserved its success. From its famous opening sentence – "The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel" – Gibson revealed himself as a remarkable stylist, suggesting complex swathes of implication in a single telling image. Not the least impressive aspect of the novel is the way in which Gibson appears to take its world for granted, plunging us into a strange but strangely familiar future and letting us swim for ourselves.

## Doom-laden?

Tom Arden

For all that, I can't say that *Neuromancer* is a novel I much enjoy. Much of the attraction of sf – let's be honest – lies in its appeal to basically juvenile fantasies. Now, I can think of nothing I'd like more than to journey through space, encounter aliens, slip through a time portal, or hack my way through a forest of Triffids. On the other hand, jacking a computer into my head and

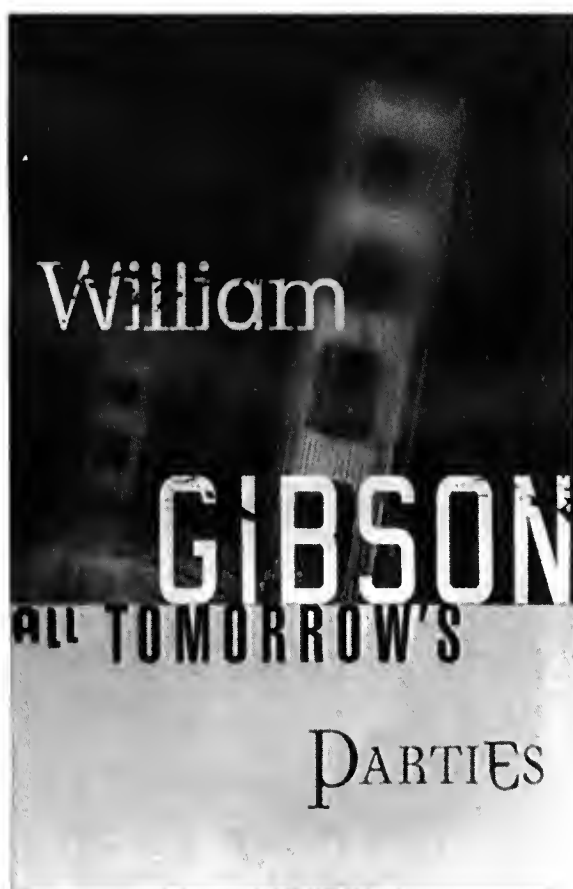
floating round in cyberspace is a prospect about as attractive to me as being one of those sexless, bodiless "virtual" entities in Greg Egan's *Diaspora*. Isn't there something terminally naff – not to mention repellent – in the whole idea of *virtual* reality?

Well, you may say, but that's the point. Of course *Neuromancer* is a dystopia, its world replete with all the hi-tech barbarism of capitalism in its last decadence: *this*, says the book, is where we're headed (if we don't watch out). But while no one wants to live in the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, one gets the impression that a great many Gibson fans just can't wait for this groovily ultra-computerized future. Nowhere, perhaps, is *Neuromancer* more quintessentially a 1980s novel than in its presentation, inadvertently or otherwise, of social and political decadence as *style* – that sense of "style" one might feel, perhaps, whilst swishing past the homeless in an Armani coat.

Homelessness figures significantly in *All Tomorrow's Parties*. Third in a loose trilogy which began with *Virtual Light* (1993) and *Idoru* (1996), the novel finds Colin Laney, from the last book, living in a cardboard box in a railway station whilst waiting for the apocalyptic event that he senses with his chemically enhanced psychic powers. Quite what this event may be is for much of the time frustratingly vague, though the book is littered with portentous references ("some very basic state is on the brink of change," and so on). Other characters – notably "rent-a-cop" Rydell, who finds himself on



REVIEWED



This is the US edition, as the UK cover is not to hand.

some murky mission – weave in and out of the plotless morass, with frequent changes in point of view only adding to the confusion.

There are good bits – numerous droll observations, such as that heroin is the opiate of the masses, and telling ones, for example about the modern absence of true “Bohemias,” because alternative subcultures are immediately absorbed into the capitalist machine. One character is a collector of antique watches, and Gibson makes moving use of the mechanical watch as a symbol not only of time but of “time past” and the fragility of human history. One does not doubt Gibson’s talent: the problem is the passivity of his characters and the utter hopelessness his vision engenders. Laney, “eyes wide against the pressure of information,” feels merely “blankness at the core of his being.” Rydell, at one point, throws rocks into a “weird, gray, rubbery polymer, a perpetual semi-liquid” that surrounds a building in an earthquake zone:

They didn’t make much of a noise when they hit, and in fact they vanished entirely. Just ripped straight into it and then it sealed over behind them, like nothing had happened. And Rydell had started to see that as emblematic of broader things, how he was like those rocks in his passage through the world, and how the polymer was like life, sealing over behind him, never leaving any trace at all that he’d been there.

Possibly this is an accurate vision of life, and the novel an accurate forecast of the future. We’re certainly meant to think so: much has been made of Gibson-as-prophet. But other sf futures haven’t come to pass, so why should his? *Must* the future be so much worse than the past? *Must* techno-capitalism march on unchallenged, until all life is degraded and the planet only a polluted mess? Well, perhaps the answer is yes: but books like this, in their relentless insistence on our powerlessness, are hardly going to help matters. Besides, if the end is nigh, novelists might at least *entertain* us while we’re waiting. We can only hope there’s an awful lot of drink – or strange new drugs – at all tomorrow’s parties.

Gibson is a novelist who is nowadays marketed as “mainstream,” after beginning – let it be recalled – in the ranks of genre. First-time novelist Frank Tallis, by contrast, has started off firmly in the mainstream, or so the arty packaging of his book *Killing Time* (Hamish Hamilton, £9.99) would suggest. In many ways this is a comic novel of character and society, with echoes of Ian McEwan, Martin Amis, and Kingsley Amis too. But it also has considerable sf inter-

est – though you wouldn’t think so in the beginning.

Tallis’s first-person narrator is a postgrad student whose misfortune it is to be called Tom Jones, whilst quite lacking the sexual success of either Henry Fielding’s character, or his more recent namesake. He puts this down to his academic field: “Sex and the study of mathematics do not seem to go together.” All this changes when he meets Anna. Urged on by his sex-crazed mate Dave, Tom suddenly finds himself with a sex life of his own – and one frequently and explicitly described, not least of all when Tom is regaling Dave with details of everything he’s done with Anna, and getting advice on what to do next.

Some might find all this sexist, tiresome, or both. But this is to reckon without Tallis’s irony. Tom thinks he’s appealing to our sympathies, that we’ll be on his side; in truth, he’s a classic “unreliable narrator.” The more you think about him, the more you see through him. He’s a monster, though often one who makes you laugh aloud: the passage on *Brave New World*, childbirth, and the sex life of his parents (pp. 27-29) being a particular *tour de force*.

But Tallis offers much more. Three things deepen the story. First, Tom is looking back on events which were some time in the past. We know from early on that something has happened to Anna. She’s missing; but why? Second, Tom has been working on the side for a shady software company,

spending large amounts of time immersed in an illegal, disorienting VR game. Third, he’s discovered an obscure Victorian scientific paper which seems to explain how to take daguerreotypes of *past* scenes – how, literally, to see into the past. Tom resolves to try it.

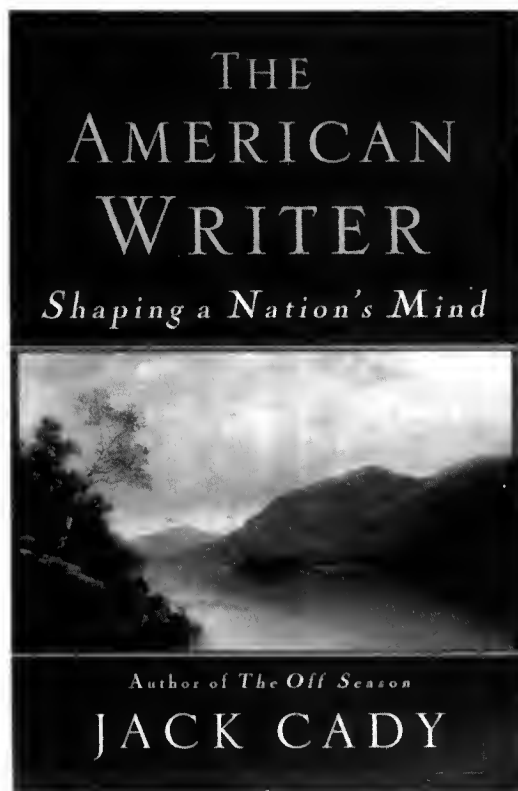
To explain how Tallis draws these strands together into a denouement at once inevitable but astonishing would be to spoil things. Suffice to say that this is a very funny book and a very good one. *Killing Time* is that rare thing, not an sf novel published cynically as mainstream, but a genuine hybrid of sf and what Kingsley Amis used to call the “human heart stuff.” It works. It’s a winner.

In an age when most fantasy writers are highly prolific – often, of course, by necessity – Peter S. Beagle stands out as an anomaly. Few major fantasists since Tolkien can have published so little: in Beagle’s case, four novels since 1960 (notably the 1968 classic *The Last Unicorn*), one novella, and now his new collection *The Magician of Karakosk and Other Stories* (Souvenir Press, £9.99).

In a Foreword, Beagle reveals his contempt for genre fantasy – “epic trilogies culminating with elves, dwarves, wizards and men standing at Armageddon and waving magic swords and assorted enchanted jewelry ...” Beagle doesn’t *do* trilogies, he tells us (just as well, considering his rate of production!), and nor does he do sequels: all of which is by way of excusing the fact that the new book *is* a sequel of sorts, a return to the world of *The Innkeeper’s Song* (1993). As Beagle explains it, he missed that world so deeply that he simply had to go back.

Not the least of Beagle’s distinctions, in a field choked with lumpish, unimaginative storytelling, is his determination to experiment with narrative. *The Innkeeper’s Song* told its tale through multiple first-person narrators, and the technique is reprised here, though here we have a set of independent tales. If there’s a hint of Chaucer or Boccaccio, disappointingly it remains only a hint: there’s no “frame tale,” no particular reason why the tales are being told, and in any case there are only six of them.

But they’re good. Only one, “Lal and Soukyan,” harks back directly to *The Innkeeper’s Song*, with characters from that novel meeting again many years later. Of the remaining stories – which take place, says Beagle, “in different corners of my nameless world” – two are told in the style of classic folk tales (“Once ... there was a magician who was too good at magic”); one is the droll tale of a com-



pany of players who get on the wrong side of the rich and powerful; and two are strange, moving meditations on time and change, which go well beyond the usual range of fantasy.

In "The Last Song of Sirit Byar," Beagle takes considerable risks in realistically depicting the squalor and degradation of his medieval world. Fantasists from "Ossian" to William Morris to Tolkien have painted such worlds as glamorously heroic. In refusing to be *consoling*, Beagle undermines much of the romantic appeal of fantasy – yet turns the story, in the end, to a conclusion which is all the more romantic for what has gone before. In "Giant Bones," an old man tells a boy about the death of a race of giants. Above all, Beagle is fascinated by the meaning of stories. "All stories are lies," says his character Lal, "just because they *are* stories. But they are true even so, every one of them, and sometimes the biggest lies turn out to be the truest of all."

Storytelling, and the meaning of stories, also looms large for American horror novelist Jack Cady. In *The American Writer: Shaping a Nation's Mind* (St Martin's, \$26.95), Cady sets out to tell young American writers "things I wish someone had

told me" – all the things they need to know in order to be, well, American writers. Alas, that fate is denied me; but being an avid reader of anything on the art of writing, how to write, and how writers write, I approached this book with interest – hoping, perhaps, for something along the lines of Stephen King's *Danse Macabre* or Ray Bradbury's brief but brilliant *Zen in the Art of Writing*. My hopes were vain.

To be an American writer, says Cady, you need to understand America, which means understanding America's past. Accordingly, almost all the book consists of a potted history of America and Am Lit. (Cady not only shows no interest in any other country, but also has a disarming tendency to write things like "The glory of America is...") It's all done in a chatty, readable style, which is just as well if young Americans – young *writers* – are really as ignorant as the book would appear to imply. (Hey man, did you know the States had, like, a Civil War?)

This is a well-intentioned book. The historical overview is useful; the lit-crit is good in parts; but it's difficult to see how all this is going to encourage young writers – American or otherwise – in their work. Analyzing other writers does not, in itself, help anyone to write, and besides, a great many

writers here are hardly *analyzed* at all: John Dos Passos gets twelve pages (well, he did write a book called *U.S.A.*), but Faulkner, Richard Wright, Hemingway, Hammett and James M. Cain flit by in less than three, which is absurd.

Most disappointing is Cady's treatment of "the fantastic" in literature, a subject on which one would expect him to have something to say. What we get is six pages, with Ray Bradbury the only writer discussed in (relative) detail. Even Stephen King is ignored. And what about the immense influence, in America, of non-American writers – Tolkien, for a start?

If you want to understand Am Lit – not least of all its connections with the fantastic – two old warhorses, Richard Chase's *The American Novel and Its Tradition* and Leslie Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel*, are better places to start than this. If you just want to write and don't know how, Dorothea Brande's *Becoming a Writer* is by far the best book ever written on the subject.

Tom Arden

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This month's books showed unreliable smiles, as though there were other expressions trying to punch through the skin, or through the mask. Everything reminded me of something else, and the old joke about nostalgia not being what it used to be came frequently to mind. For although I'll use the word "derivative" with care – these days it is usually taken as an insult, and I do not mean to suggest that fiction that uses the past as a springboard is necessarily a bad thing – it cannot be denied that with the exception of the Shirley Jackson reissue this selection felt comprised of, dipped in, or even stuffed full of existing work. Let us say, for the sake of simplicity, that some very old hats are being worn.

None older, sadder or more battered than Norman Spinrad's new novel, *Greenhouse Summer* (Tor, \$24.95). And it's a pity. For some reason I had thought Spinrad passed away some years ago, but was reminded of his previous novel, *Pictures at 11*, and looked forward to reading this new one. Now I know that he is still perfectly capable of filling the pages with adequate sentences; it's simply the case that his *imagination* has died. *Greenhouse Summer* makes the reader check the spine. Could it be that there are two Norman Spinrads? That this is his less-talented offspring?

We must forget that Spinrad was part of the New Wave because there is nothing modish about this stuffy old

## So Yesterday

David Mathew

eco-potboiler. There are rants against "capitalist slime" and there is a creaking plot about a threat to the biosphere, which Monique, our heroine, might be able to save. But is this the most important question? Arguably not, because Spinrad seems to place

equal emphasis on the character's decision-making when it comes to the removal of her clothes. Almost as though the author understands that the audience will require a snooze-break, he tosses off a couple of half-hearted "will-she-won't-she" strands, which occasion some pretty weak work:

Eric smiled. "You intend to keep me up that late?" he said.

Monique found herself wondering if she could. Or if *he* could. But this was not the time to find out.

"Perchance in your dreams this night, sweet prince," she said dryly, rising. "Business before... *pleasure*," she said cockteasingly. "New York girls never do it the other way around."

Oh dear. What went wrong? Norman Spinrad, who was once known for his anger, cannot even shock any more, if indeed the more misogynistic comments throughout *Greenhouse Summer* were designed so to do. Maybe they weren't – but that would be more tragic still: it would mean that the author tried in vain to write convincingly about female-male relationships, and failed categorically. But this is not the Spinrad of *Bug Jack Barron* (1969), nor the Spinrad who angered the sf community by regarding them, more or less, as a nightmare scrum of babbling nerds. Something has happened.

Few interviews will reveal the true person, but a good interview will

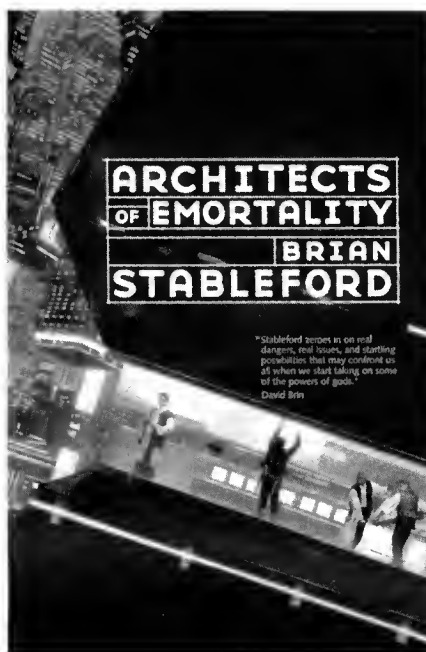
reveal the true interviewee, and for many subjects that is as close as we are likely to get. For years Spinrad struck me as one of those fireworks that Bonfire Night adventurists try to warn us about: the ones that are not to be returned to. Well, that perception was correct, but the reasons for the warning were misconstrued... None of which is to say, of course, that a writer should not be allowed to grow up, or that he should be dissuaded from maturing. But once he has thrown his toys from the pram, it is reasonable for an audience to expect a few grizzles that would indicate the power being held in check. *Greenhouse Summer* is as flat as levelled masonry. Even the details of his previous achievements seem intent on obscuring the "Stormin' Norman" side of Spinrad's character and CV. Mention is made, for example, of the *Star Trek* episode that he wrote a long time ago, but is it *relevant* now?

Like the other great and (once) scary Norman of American letters – I refer to Mailer – Spinrad was loud, bombastic, overendowed, and wildly variable in quality, but not in force. As with Mailer, there were attempts to please the crowd, even if the aim of pleasing was achieved only after the audience had been scandalized. The difference is that Mailer continues to produce worthwhile work. I had wanted this book to set the paper alight; instead it has pulped it. And where we used to hear punk music through his riffs, now we hear that it's time for Horlicks. *Greenhouse Summer* is not good, it's not awful, but it is a shame.

Gene Wolfe, it is easy to infer, is one of literature's gentle giants. He has always got something interesting to say, and a fatherly way of saying it, and the stories well up from inside a house-large heart, or so it seems. *On Blue's Waters* (Tor, \$24.95) is the first volume of *The Book of the Short Sun*, and the author responds to the warmth of his various suns with aplomb:

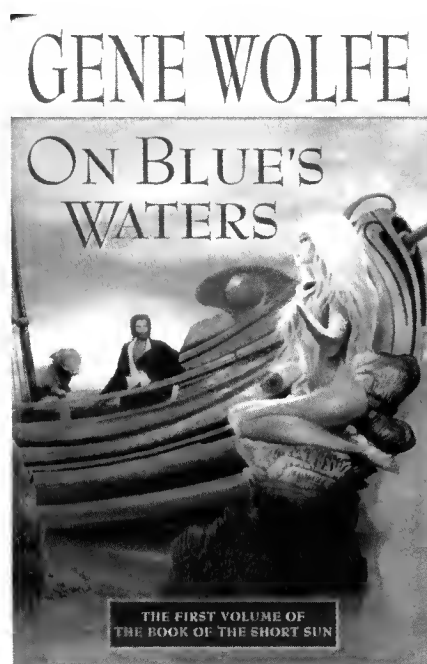
"Not long after I finished my fish, the sun was squarely overhead. I have never become completely accustomed to a sun that moves across the sky. We speak here of the Long Sun we left and this Short Sun to which we have come; but it seems to me that the difference implied by the change of shape is small, while the difference between this sun which moves and that one which does not is profound."

The narrator is Horn, who appeared in earlier "Sun" work; an apparently simple man with his share of family problems, including a son who wants to kill him. Required to find a saviour-figure named Silk, who will lead the impoverished community into prosperity, Horn embarks out into the waters



on his "sloop." He is attacked by a monster; obliged to ask (not rhetorically) if he should "leave a maimed and friendless young woman alone in the middle of the sea." He deals with the supernatural and with the guilt of infidelity, and we can see the way open to the next volume, *In Green's Jungles*.

Quite apart from being a beautiful, compelling read, which deals with the challenge of writing itself, *On Blue's Waters* is a fixed stare at the complexities of apostlehood. "It may be that our gods did not come among us except by enlightenment and possession because they were too large to do so... A man may like insects... But although that man may walk, he may



not walk with his pets the insects. He is too big for it."

Wearing its ponderous title (a gift from the publisher) like a "Kick Me" sign, *Architects of Emortality* (Tor, \$24.95) is the latest by Brian Stableford, and a sequel to *Inherit the Earth*. Fuzzy around the edges, it is hard sf that treats the reader gently; at times and in places it even swerves towards the parodic. And yes, I enjoyed it very much. It features a farflung Oscar Wilde, who is not *the* Oscar Wilde a score of rejuvenations (or "rejuves") down the line – because that would have been too fey – but a "sort-of" Oscar Wilde, who flutters around and camps it up for 300 pages, even after he has been accused of murder by a grumpy female detective. Sharing her name with Baker Street's finest, said detective, Charlotte Holmes, who finds Oscar both "humiliating" and attractive, is eager to prove her mettle to her boss, who is (audaciously) named Watson. Truly. The crimes involve a prostitute with non-traceable DNA and some modified flowers, which mess with the victim's genetic-makeup, and bump him off. All of the victims are connected to a particular Australian university.

People can go through the sort of surgery that keeps them young for years and years, and the island of Manhattan is going through a similar facelift itself. Wilde and Holmes, before long working in conjunction, have to solve the rich and rewarding puzzles. The flowers, or Fleurs du Mal, are a good idea; but it is the character of Wilde that keeps the thriller moving. What we have, in addition, are references to 19th-century literature (or earlier: for example, *Paradise Lost*), but I kept hearing Lou Reed, from the *Transformer* album, at his bitchy best, singing: "Vicious! You hit me with a flower! You do it every hour! Oh baby, you're so vicious..." Perhaps this was intended; perhaps not. But what I do know is that *Architects of Emortality* felt good; it's a paradigm of joyful writing.

And on to the best book of the month by far: the reissue of Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (Robinson, £6.99). Ah, nostalgia: the aimless thrill of wandering and wondering along old pathways! Bless its every frozen breath, it is such a great and chilling read... It's a very strange time, and perhaps that is why Jackson's novel works so well, years after its initial publication in 1959. Robinson should be congratulated for bringing the story to light again, even if this has been done to tie in with a pathetic film version, whose admirers (to be rudely assumptive for a moment) might be hard-pushed to



appreciate Jackson's ironies and art. *The Haunting of Hill House* is coolly simple and emotionally barbed-wired. It deals with universal themes and timeless preoccupations: not least with our preoccupation with time. The principal character (we'd have difficulty in justifying the word "heroine") has to face up to her past, because the house is making the past confront her. This character, Eleanor, has lived her life – or wasted it – in the pursuit of approval, while taking care of her wretched mother, now deceased. Because of psychic situations of which she was a part as a child, she is invited to the secluded Hill House.

The man who invites her is Doctor Montague, "a doctor of philosophy", who embarks upon an experiment to observe the effects of a supposedly haunted house on a group of people. Also present are a scallywaggish young man (related to the house's owner) and a childish, artistic woman who remains an abstract, a thorn in the reader's mind, for some time. But Eleanor is our eyes and ears; Eleanor's is the voice we hear, even when it is whispering and others are

screaming. From her arrival – her argument with the man at the gate and her confusion at the house-keeper's behaviour – we view a somewhat stubborn woman who is swift to fritter away any good thoughts she might briefly entertain about herself. Instead, to begin with, she wants to be more like the other female guest; but in an atmosphere of menace, such as that at Hill House, camaraderie cannot last for long. Soon we realize that we are also observing the effects that the people have on the house: old dreams are stirred up, and Eleanor, with a vacuum in her life, is a vessel for certain supernatural goings-on. Like the buildings in William Hope Hodgson's *The House on the Borderland*, or more recently, Ramsey Campbell's *The House on Nazareth Hill*, Jackson's Hill House has the status of a character, specifically a villain, as well as being a circumference for the plot. Hill House is a place where the past lives on and it forces its way back through agents of the present.

Freezing draughts, slamming doors and strange pieces of writing: several kinds of unexplainable events take

place in the heart of the building; and the gothic genre – which relies, functionally, on fictional isolation and a fondness for melodrama – is a waving cousin, Jackson always having had her teeth in the gothic bone. The strange feel to the house is partly explained by the fact that it was not built with its walls at right-angles, and we could say something similar about the plot, which is wonky, but the great skill of *The Haunting of Hill House* is the subtlety. It works like a whisper (Is that really what was said? Did I hear that correctly?) and it gives rise to helpless admiration and lateral thought. If Chrissie Hynde was right to say that 50 is the new 30, then perhaps another paradox is also true: that the past is the new future. Could it be that the simplest route onwards is to dream our backwards, albeit dragging with us our given store of contemporary knowledge? Reassessment and reappraisal: the new key initiatives? It could be. On the evidence of this month's selection of books it would seem that truly original thought is so yesterday.

David Mathew

If you can write plain English competently, and have something worthwhile to say in it, I'll applaud your efforts. Far fewer can write well in an elaborate, ornamental mode, which is why "fine writing" has become a pejorative term. Darrell Schweitzer is among those few, which makes his collection, *Refugees From an Imaginary Country* (Owlswick, \$15), exceptional.

His most obvious influences are Dunsany (his prose rhythms, and the sorts of moral he presents) and Zelazny (his approach to the mythic), and his principal creation is the almost-Egypt of the magician Sekenre (who figures in one of the best of the 22 densely written stories here, "On the Last Night of the Festival of the Dead"). He has started another cycle about the doom-laden "Knights Inquisitor," servants of the unforgiving, unrewarding goddess Malevendra, of whom the true stories aren't pretty, and the pretty stories aren't true, but most stories stand alone, including the magnificent "Mysteries of the Faceless King" and "King Yvorian's Wager," in which the influence of Dunsany so transcends pastiche that it might be a posthumous addition to the canon. Excellent also is "The Knight of the Pale Countenance," Schweitzer's new take on the antecedents of Merlin, which resembles Gene Wolfe's retellings of familiar tales.

Even the few that didn't work for me had their merits. "Angry Man" is elegantly written, but too obviously a five-finger exercise to engage the reader fully; "Climbing" presents a

## "Fine Writing"

Chris Gilmore

charming vision, but isn't actually about anything; and in "The Death of Falstaff," a consideration of the conflicts of duty and friendship, Schweitzer should have decided either to write in current English or to essay Jacobean pastiche – to drop the occasional archaism is insufficient.

Many stories recount the tribulations of a young man earmarked for

some mysterious and (perhaps) glorious destiny, who must first undergo a difficult, dangerous and painful transition into manhood – a theme which will ring bells with anyone who can recall an adolescence, no matter how humdrum; moreover they, and some of the adults, are manipulated by unseen powers whose intentions are surely alien and may be sinister – a combination to awake the paranoid within us all. It makes for a collection stiff with the most enjoyable angst and foreboding, and my recommendation is to read the book straight through, but only two or three at a time. Take a fortnight over it, so as to get the flavour without jading the appetite. Then, if you want to be generous to someone of taste, buy him a copy – but keep your own to re-read.

Of all historical theories, the most beguiling and the best suited to provide an intellectual framework for science fiction is Spengler's, with its assumptions of cultural birth, development, ossification and death. It lies at the heart of all Poul Anderson's best work and most of Jack Vance's, and was explicitly invoked by James Blish in his *Cities in Flight* quartet. Now Robert Charles Wilson has taken it up in *Bios* (Tor, \$22.95), a novel which recalls both Harry Harrison's *Deathworld* books and Tricia Sullivan's *Dreaming in Smoke*.

The setting is Isis, an earthlike world in a nearby system, but with an uncomfortable character which seems all too likely to be encountered should interstellar flight ever become practi-

cable: evolution there has given rise to similar forms following functions similar to those we know, but on the basis of dissimilar DNA. Consequently everything organic (the bios of the title) is toxic to Earth life; and Wilson evokes a reasonably plausible biochemical mechanism to ensure that the feeling isn't mutual – the local micro- (and presumably macro-) organisms can and most enthusiastically will devour us, reveling in our lack of antibodies. Hither comes Zoe (oh yes, the pun is intentional), cloned specialist explorer and the principal viewpoint, but in the larger scheme of things, a very small cog in a very complex wheel.

For Wilson has considered deeply the sort of character a terminally decadent but internally stable culture might develop. It's rigidly stratified of course, and dominated by a closed cabal of ruling Families; but being technically sophisticated it requires a technical/managerial upper middle class – the traditional level from which long-born young men of brains and balls re-invigorate the aristocracy by marrying their daughters. Not on Earth, though; eunuchry is the price of promotion to the higher grades, and the orchidectomy scar a badge of status.

Off Earth, from Mars all the way to the Oort Cloud, things are otherwise. Here a new, virile culture is growing up, cash-poor but too rich in technical know-how for Earth to ignore. The "Kuipers" do most of the real work in the claustrophobic scientific stations (orbital and surface-based), from which the secrets of Isis are probed and its wealth (mainly hyper-exotic pharmaceuticals) extracted; and it is from the conflict of values between them and the eunuch head of the project that the book draws its dynamics.

But this in no work of arid, sociological exegesis, because Zoe is not quite what she seems. For the convenience of those at home, it was intended that she should be emotionally (but not physically) frigid, incapable of enjoying a heterosexual relationship; but someone has sabotaged this charming plan, and in the hothouse atmosphere of the overcrowded stations the conditioning is wearing off. Plenty of scope for romance, then, between the surface (where every spore is lethal) and the stations where, should the political game-plan demand it, Zoe may any moment be wasted without compunction. Altogether, here is just what hard sf ought to be: thoughtful, imaginative and unobtrusively stored with the noblest human ideals – which is to say, those to which I myself subscribe.

I am bound to add that Wilson's conclusion contains an element of mysticism to which I don't subscribe, and which I would decry in a lesser

writer. As it was, I went the extra mile and suspended my disbelief – a sacrifice worth making for the sake of a good book; read it, and become a better person.

Among the sub-genres to which science fantasy is especially well adapted is the kind where what the writer appears to be doing is subtly at odds with what one thinks he may be up to – apart from dropping clues and red herrings to bamboozle the reader. Perhaps the best so far was Roger Zelazny's *Lord of Light*, which was written from the viewpoint of a Hindu pseudo-pantheon. In *Lilith's Castle* (Voyager, £6.99), Gill Alderman seems at first to be attempting much the same with the bloodthirsty, shamanistic magic of the Mongols – though this time from the viewpoints of Gry, a young woman (and thus bottom of the heap) and her enemy Aza, an especially sinister shaman.

There's certainly something amiss with the local mythology, for since when did the Mongols go in awe of Asmodeus, who disparages marriages? The fauna are wrong as well... is Alderman attempting something on the lines of Harry Harrison's *Captive Universe*, perhaps? Or Alfred Bester's "Disappearing Act"? Or L. Ron Hubbard's *Typewriter in the Sky*? Koschei the Deathless knows, and we're made privy to his lucubrations, but his principal topic is his own sensibilities, which he has cultivated far too assiduously to permit the least regard for those of anyone else.

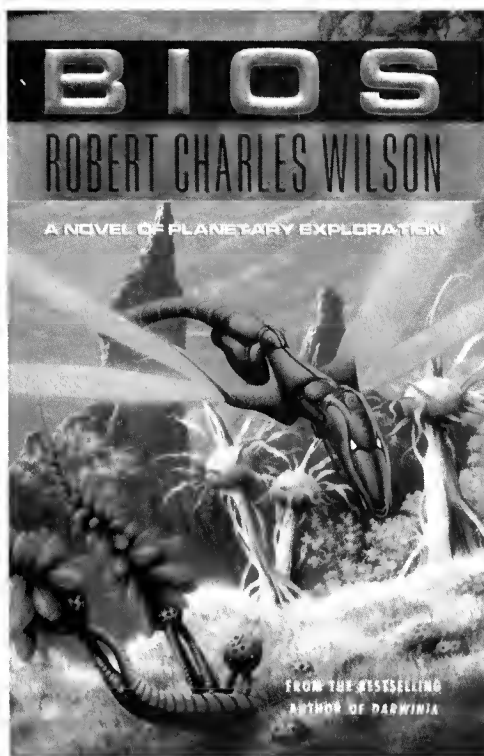
But to such story as there is. Gry,

having been condemned for blasphemous traffickings with the ghost of her father, seeks to be reunited with him – and not by the obvious route of suicide, but by means of a quest to nowhere in particular on his great sorrel stallion, desultorily pursued by Aza on a headless flying horse of dry bones. The road soon takes them to places far more varied and exciting than the endless steppe, where they meet enough glamorous characters to furnish an entire new *1001 Nights*, including talking animals, unborn infants, exotic dancers, bloodthirsty merfolk, gallant gallants, raucous gypsies, a sturdy innkeeper, a rough-hewn carter, a pragmatic butcher. Many of them have stories to tell in appropriately extravagant language, but we're onto page 250 before there's any hint as to what is truly going on, apart from some teasing references of Koschei's to his "Memory Palace" – which just happens to be the title of Alderman's last book, to which I gave a rather baffled review in *Interzone* 110.

Having read and enjoyed it without being at all sure how much of it I'd understood, I had rather more idea of what was going on here than if I'd come unprepared – but not that much more. Having finished this one, I conclude that, for all its endearing qualities, it's a work of extreme self-indulgence. Nor is it an easy read; I found myself pausing every dozen lines or so to go back and savour the richness of the imagery, and getting through it in a week has brought on surfeit. Read it by all means for the lush sensuousity of the language, but limit yourself to three or four pages a day; and don't be dismayed if you lose track of the plot – you'll truly be none the poorer.

I conclude with a brace of novellas. To take the simpler first, E. C. Tubb's *Death God's Doom* (Cosmos Books, £6 or \$10) reads like nothing so much as a sampler made up to demonstrate what *Sword & Sorcery* is like. In 120 pages it goes through all the traditional tropes, with a hard-bitten, mysterious, but basically good-egg hero, plenty of malign magic, evil priests, a captive princess, fell beasts, scenes of mayhem in temples, taverns and torture chambers – and all played dead straight. If you like this sort of thing, Tubb seems to be saying, this is the sort of thing you will like; and if you like a book you can get through in an afternoon, you'll like it better; if you crave new and startling ideas, go elsewhere.

You could do worse than go to some of Tubb's early short stories, which handled such topics as the emotional and economic pressures that beset a midget spaceman in a time of economic recession; but they never really caught



on, and I'm just glad to see that at 80 he's still able to beat most of the youngsters at Fritz Leiber's game.

Someone ought to devote a PhD to defining the urban fantasy, where the character of the backdrop city is of more significance than that of any of its denizens (rum though they invariably are). It seems to appeal to the more literary sort of writer, with Malacia (Aldiss), Paradys (Lee) and Viriconium (Harrison) springing to mind, and there are plenty more such milieux, not all of them named. The latest, and surely oddest, is San Veneficio, setting of Michael Cosco's *The Divinity Student* (Buzzcity Press, \$14.99). As with many such cities, the streets tend to move about, but the

rail network remains stable, so that trains may run through hospitals, prisons or your living room; the clergy pack loaded pistols; and by night the streets throng with animal and human ghosts.

The tale begins uncompromisingly enough when; the unnamed student, enjoying a walk in the rain, is struck by lightning and killed, poor chap. But help is at hand: some anonymous Samaritans seize his body, eviscerate it, stuff the cavity with literature (hand-written, typed and printed), stitch him up and send him on his way. Well, Gentle Reader, which of us wouldn't do the same? Though some of us might be a little less cavalier with the steaming entrails.

Having thus completed his studies,

the Student, like any arts graduate, gets himself a boring and futile job, falls in love, and discovers a purpose in life – his being to reconstruct a lost catalogue of novel words, each capable of being defined only in terms of a morbid little story. As this requires him to engage in wholesale grave-robbing followed by the most intimate possible contact with corpses in varying stages of decomposition, the atmosphere rapidly becomes distinctly unwholesome; indeed, Cisco has raised unwholesome gusto to an unprecedented pitch. Recommended, therefore, only to decadence buffs of iron constitution – and then only on an empty stomach.

Chris Gilmore

Ambrose Bierce doesn't define "book" or "bibliography" in my copy of *The Devil's Dictionary* – one of the few of his books still regularly in print today – but he does define "learning," which is somewhat *à propos*. "Learning," he says, is "the kind of ignorance distinguishing the studious." It's a definition that is singularly appropriate when it comes to bibliographies, especially of prolific writers. As I have found when trying to produce detailed bibliographies, the more you unearth, the more you need to know. Past bibliographers have had this trouble with Bierce, and his work has been notoriously difficult to chart. There has been no previous complete bibliography of Bierce's journalism or fiction. As a consequence there are all manner of errors when it comes to identifying the original publication dates of some of his stories.

Take his oft-reprinted early robot story, "Moxon's Master." When Damon Knight reprinted it in *A Century of Science Fiction* (1962) he dated its original publication as 1893, in *Can Such Things Be?*, the same citation given by *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. Later reference works, such as Everett Bleiler's *Science Fiction: The Early Years* and William Contento's *Index to Science Fiction Anthologies and Collections* cite the appearance in the *Collected Works* edition of *Can Such Things Be?* published in 1910. Even Sam Moskowitz never detailed the original source for this story – his brief references to it in *Explorers of the Infinite* and *The Coming of the Robots* are uncharacteristically vague. When Sam was working on *Science Fiction in Old San Francisco* I wrote to him about Bierce and asked specifically if he had the original publication date for "Moxon's Master." He replied that he did, but he was saving this datum and others (on which he had spent thousands of dollars in research) for the second volume of *Science Fiction in Old San Fran-*

## Bibliographing Bierce

Mike Ashley

cisco which, alas, remains unpublished. But at last, with the publication of *Ambrose Bierce: An Annotated Biography of Primary Sources* by S. T. Joshi and David E. Schultz (Greenwood Press, \$79.95), we can discover that "A Night at Moxon's", as it was originally entitled, first appeared in *The San Francisco Examiner* for 16th April 1899.

So now there are no more excuses. In 362 pages listing 65 separate books by Bierce (47 of which have appeared since his disappearance) and 3,603 separate essays, stories, columns and other miscellanea by Bierce (only 12 of which have appeared since his disappearance), this book provides all the

basic data about the first publication and reprintings of everything that he wrote, going right back to his first published piece, a poem, "Basilica" in *The Californian* for 21st September 1867. It even lists 36 items known to exist but as yet untraced.

Bierce has been strangely neglected in recent years, though both Joshi and Schultz are undertaking considerable efforts themselves to get his work back into print. Yet along with W. C. Morrow, Robert Duncan Milne, Emma Frances Dawson and others of his contemporaries, Bierce wrote some of the most remarkable macabre, bizarre and fantastic fiction to come out of California in the 1880s and 1890s, including some science fiction. Although you need to know what you're looking for, this bibliography at last identifies the sources for all of Bierce's well-known stories, draws attention to plenty of lesser-known and many unprinted stories, and sets them within the chronological context of his journalism – which accounted for almost all of his writing. It's easy to forget that he had a writing career that spanned over 45 years. No wonder he was a tired "Old Gringo" who vanished in the Mexican Civil War. The editors' brief but sufficient introduction throws no new light on Bierce's disappearance, nor would you expect it to. It provides an overview of Bierce's life and career to help you orientate yourself through the exhaustive list of his works.

The listings are occasionally annotated but generally there is little to help you appreciate what each item is about. This is clearly the new base camp in the re-exploration of Ambrose Bierce. But it's most welcome and should stop all future arguments about dates and provenance. Scholars of weird fiction and science fiction take note. The reassessment of Ambrose Bierce starts here.

Mike Ashley

# BOOKS RECEIVED



## OCTOBER 1999

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified. Official publication dates, where known, are given in *italics* at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in *quotes* following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Anderson, Poul. **Operation Chaos**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-87242-9, 2S6pp, trade paperback, \$12.95. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1971; set in a modern-day world where magic exists, and one of Anderson's more fondly-remembered fantasies, it's a "fix-up" of stories which first appeared in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* during the 1950s and 1960s; recommended.) *2nd November 1999.*

Anthony, Mark. **Beyond the Pale: Book One of The Last Rune**. Earthlight, 0-671-02191-S, S27pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Youll, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1998.) *15th November 1999.*

Anthony, Mark. **The Keep of Fire: Book Two of The Last Rune**. Earthlight, 0-684-86041-4, 442pp, C-format paperback, cover by Steve Youll, £9.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1999; a follow-up to the author's debut novel *Beyond the Pale*.) *15th November 1999.*

Anthony, Piers, and Jo Anne Tausch. **The Secret of Spring**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86464-7, 253pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; this is another of Anthony's reworkings of a raw first novel by an unknown writer; as with

previous examples of the form, there are separate explanatory afterwords by the two authors; Anthony tells us that this is his "21st collaborative novel, and 104th overall book.") *March 2000.*

Applegate, K. A. **The Andalite Chronicles**. "The story that came before *Ani-morphs*." Scholastic/Hippo, ISBN 0-439-01145-0, 340pp, B-format paperback, £5.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first published in the USA, 1997; a prequel to the popular "Animorphs" series about shape-changers.) *October 1999.*

Ashley, Mike, ed. **The Mammoth Book of Seriously Comic Fantasy**. Robinson, ISBN 1-84119-089-6, xiv+494pp, B-format paperback, cover by Julek Heller, £6.99. (Humorous fantasy anthology, first edition; a follow-up to last year's *Mammoth Book of Comic Fantasy*, it contains reprint stories by Anthony Armstrong, John Kendrick Bangs, Ambrose Bierce, Molly Brown, Elizabeth Counihan, Seamus Cullen, Avram Davidson & Grania Davis, L. Sprague de Camp, George Alec Effinger, Harlan Ellison, Alan Dean Foster, Neil Gaiman, Craig Shaw Gardner, W. S. Gilbert, Ron Goulart, John Grant, Harry Harrison, James P. Hogan, Terry Jones, David Langford ["The Case of Jack the Clipper," from *Interzone*], Archibald Marshall, John Morressy, Lawrence Schimel and others, together with original stories by Eliot Fintushel, Esther Friesner, Tom Holt, Charles Partington, Gene Wolfe and others; as ever, Ashley has gone out of his way to include some unfamiliar material; recommended.) *28th October 1999.*

Atkins, Peter. **Wishmaster and Other Stories**. Introduction by Ramsey Campbell. Pumpkin Books [PO Box 297, Nottingham NG2 4GW], ISBN 1-901914-18-6, x+2SSpp, hardcover, cover by Les Edwards,

£16.99. (Horror collection, first edition; the title "story," which fills half the book, is a movie screenplay [produced by Wes Craven, 1997]; there are eleven other pieces, several of them short-shorts and mostly reprinted from American anthologies; one, previously unpublished, is written in verse form.) *October 1999.*

Aylett, Steve. **The Inflatable Volunteer**. Phoenix House, ISBN 1-861591-63-2, 166pp, trade paperback, cover by Daniel Mackie, £8.99. (Humorous literary fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1999; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; "his most hallucinatory vision yet," according to the publishers.) *18th November 1999.*

Barnes, John. **Candle**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-89077-X, 237pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's set after "the Meme Wars" and is about "individualism and society.") *February 2000.*

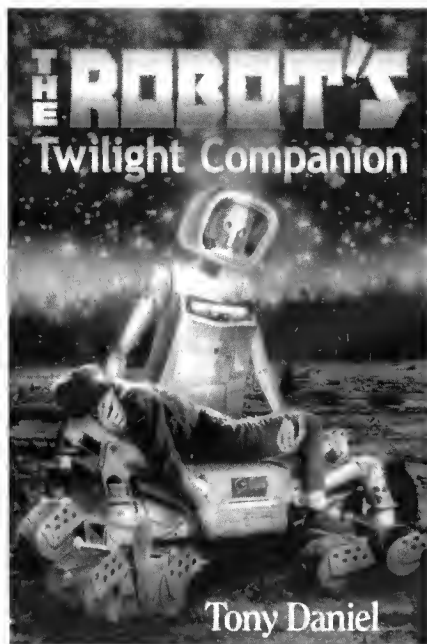
Baxter, Stephen. **Manifold: Time**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-43075-1, 441pp, hardcover, \$24. (Sf novel, first published in the UK as *Time: Manifold 1*, 1999; proof copy received; reviewed by Paul J. McAuley in *Interzone* 148.) *January 2000.*

Bender, Hy. **The Sandman Companion**. "A Dreamer's Guide to the Award-Winning Comics Series." DC/Vertigo, ISBN 1-S63891-46S-3, 288pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Illustrated companion to the most highly-praised series of "literary" fantasy graphic novels of recent years, first edition; proof copy received; it incorporates copious interview material with *Sandman* writer Neil Gaiman, and looks to be essential reading for fans of the series.) *10th November 1999.*

Borchardt, Alice. **Night of the Wolf**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-224716-X, 4S4pp, C-format paperback, cover by Heather Kern, £11.99. (Historical horror/romantic novel, first published in the USA, 1999; follow-up to *The Silver Wolf*; the author is the sister of bestselling novelist Anne Rice.) *15th November 1999.*

Constantine, Storm. **Sea Dragon Heir**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06780-2, 343pp, C-format paperback, cover by Anne Sudworth, £9.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; this looks to be a full-blooded attempt at Big Commercial Fantasy by a talented and quirky British writer; it concludes with the words: "The story continues in *Crown of Silence*" – but otherwise there is no indication on the packaging that it's the first of a trilogy, which presumably it is.) *Late entry: September [?] publication, received in October 1999.*

Daniel, Tony. **The Robot's Twilight Companion**. Golden Gryphon Press [3002 Perkins Rd., Urbana, IL 61802, USA], ISBN 0-96SS901-S-1, viii+325pp, hardcover, cover by J. K. Potter, \$24.95. (Sf collection, first





edition; Daniel's debut collection [following several novels], it contains nine stories, all reprinted from *Asimov's SF*; this is the fifth handsome book to be published by the late Jim Turner's Golden Gryphon Press; following the founder's untimely death, the press is continuing under the stewardship of Jim's brother, Gary Turner.) *Late entry: August publication, received in October 1999.*

De Lancie, John, and Peter David. **I, Q.** "Star Trek: The Next Generation." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-02443-4, 249pp, hardcover, cover by Keith Birdsong, £12.99. (SF TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1999; John de Lancie is the actor who plays the character "Q" in the series, so one presumes that the very experienced Peter David is really the principal author of the book; this is the American first edition of September 1999 with a British price added.) 4th October 1999.

Dick, Philip K. **A Scanner Darkly.** "SF Masterworks, 20." Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-847-7, 219pp, B-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £6.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1977.) 28th October 1999.

Feist, Raymond E. **Krondor: The Assassins: Book Two of The Riftwar Legacy.** Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-97707-9, 374pp, hardcover, cover by Liz Kenyon, \$25. (Fantasy computer-game novelization, first published in the UK, 1999; an outgrowth of the games *Betrayal at Krondor* and *Return to Krondor*, published by Dynamix, Inc.) 9th November 1999.

Fletcher, Jo, ed. **Horror at Halloween.** Pumpkin Books [PO Box 297, Nottingham NG2 4GW], ISBN 1-901914-09-7, x+402pp, trade paperback, cover by Terry Oakes, £7.99. (Horror anthology, first edition; this "mosaic novel" is a bit of an oddity: all the stories are set in the imaginary town of Oxrun Station, created by Charles L. Grant – however, the book as a whole is "created by Stephen Jones," who presumably is acting as a kind of packager here; the contributors are Stephen Bowkett, Diane Duane, Craig Shaw Gardner, John Gordon and Charles Grant.) October 1999.

Frank, Jane and Howard. **The Frank Collection: A Showcase of the World's Finest Fantastic Art.** Foreword by John C. Berkey. Afterword by Don Maitz. Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85585-732-4, 112pp, large-format paperback, £14.99. (SF/fantasy art portfolio, with descriptive text, based on a major private collection; first edition; it contains good reproductions of commercial fantastic art new and old, ranging from past-masters like J. Allen St John, Frank R. Paul, Virgil Finlay, Hannes Bok and Chesley Bonestell through to the modern-day folk whose published portfolios already fill the Paper Tiger list.) 11th November 1999.

Froud, Wendy, and Terri Windling. **A Midsummer Night's Faery Tale.** Photographs by John Lawrence Jones. Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-684-85559-3, 54pp, hardcover, \$18. (Juvenile fantasy novella [by Terri Windling], illustrated by photographs of fairy dolls [made by Wendy Froud]; first edition; Froud's husband, artist Brian Froud, is credited with "art direction"; an attractive gift-book, published for Halloween – despite the word "summer" in the title.) 25th October 1999.

Genge, N. E. **The Buffy Chronicles: The Unofficial Companion to Buffy the Vampire Slayer.** Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-1867-0, xv+256pp, trade paperback, £9.99. (Illustrated episode guide to the popular fantasy-horror-comedy TV series created by Joss Whedon and starring Sarah Michelle Gellar; first published in the USA, 1998.) 12th November 1999.

Gordon, John. **Skinner.** "Point Horror Unleashed." Scholastic, ISBN 0-439-01215-S, 178pp, A-format paperback, £3.99. (Juvenile horror novel, first edition.) October 1999.

Gould, Steven. **Blind Waves.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86445-0, 351pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (SF novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's set in a near future where the seas have risen by a hundred feet and many people live in floating cities.) February 2000.

Grimwood, Jon Courtenay. **redRobe.** Earthlight, 0-671-02260-1, 360pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (SF novel, first edition; proof copy received; Grimwood's fourth novel, following *neoAddix* [1997], *Lucifer's Dragon* [1998] and *reMix* [1999].) March 2000.

Hand, Elizabeth. **Black Light.** Flamingo, 0-00-655124-6, 276pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Horror novel, first published in the

USA, 1999; this seems to represent a market repositioning for Elizabeth Hand, who has previously written stylish sf and fantasy – a "literary" horror novel presented as mainstream, or a "dark and erotic blending of genres" as the publishers call it; Clive Barker and William Gibson commend it on the back cover.) 15th November 1999.

Herbert, James. **Others.** Macmillan, ISBN 0-333-76136-7, S04pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1999; see the interview with Herbert which appeared in *Interzone* 148.) 12th November 1999.

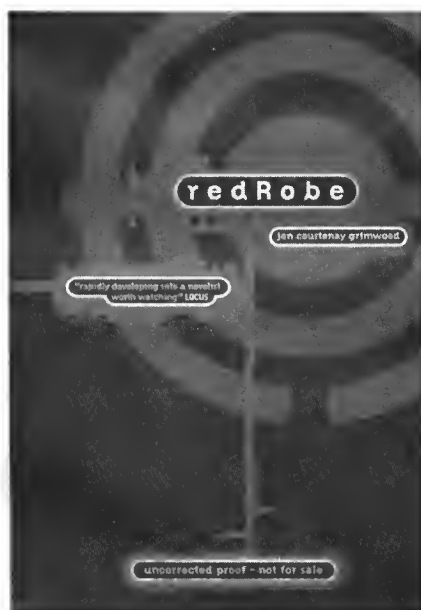
Holland, Tom. **The Sleeper in the Sands.** Abacus, ISBN 0-349-11223-1, 428pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Historical horror novel, first published in 1998; the author's fourth novel [or fifth, if one counts an earlier Ancient Rome novel called *Attis* (1995) which no one seems to have seen], following *The Vampyre*, *Supping with Panthers* and *Deliver Us from Evil*; reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 139.) 4th November 1999.

James, Peter. **Denial.** Orion, ISBN 0-75282-688-3, x+498pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in 1998; we didn't see this one when it came out in hardcover, but it appears to be the Peter James package as before, slanted to a mainstream thriller readership; two of his earlier horror novels are re-released by the same publisher at the same price on the same date – *Prophecy* [from 1992] and *Alchemist* [from 1996].) 18th November 1999.

Johnson, Oliver. **The Last Star at Dawn: Book Three of The Lightbringer Trilogy.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-732-3, 440pp, A-format paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 11th November 1999.

Jones, Stephen, and David Sutton, eds. **Dark Terrors 4: The Gollancz Book of Horror.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-894-9, 349pp, A-format paperback, cover by J. K. Potter, £6.99. (Horror anthology, first published in 1998; new stories by Stephen Baxter, Ramsey Campbell, Dennis Etchison, Christopher Fowler, Neil Gaiman, Terry Lamsley, Joel Lane, Richard Christian Matheson, Geoff Nicholson, Jay Russell, David J. Schow, Michael Marshall Smith, Thomas Tessier, Lisa Tuttle and others, plus a reprint story by Poppy Z. Brite; reviewed by David Lee Stone in *Interzone* 138.) 28th October 1999.

Jones, Stephen, ed. **The Mammoth Book of Best New Horror: Volume Ten.** Robinson, ISBN 1-84119-064-0, xv+489pp, B-format paperback, cover by Joe Roberts, £6.99. (Horror anthology, first edition; it contains reprint stories, all from the year 1998, by Peter Atkins, Chaz Brenchley,





Ramsey Campbell, Avram Davidson & Grania Davis, Harlan Ellison, Dennis Etchison, Christopher Fowler, Neil Gaiman, Caitlin R. Kiernan, Kathe Koja, Stephen Laws, Michael Marshall Smith,

Peter Straub, Lawrence Watt-Evans and others; two stories, "A Victorian Ghost Story" by Kim Newman and "Yellow and Red" by Tanith Lee, are from *Interzone*; there's also a very long detailed introduction and the usual ghoulous "necrology"; recommended.) 31st October 1999.

Joslin, Lyndon W. **Count Dracula Goes to the Movies: Stoker's Novel Adapted, 1922-1995.** McFarland [Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640, USA], ISBN 0-7864-0698-4, x+237pp, hardcover, \$44. (Illustrated critical study of the principal *Dracula* film adaptations; first edition; for the most part it covers well-trodden ground, but it's another nicely-produced volume from McFarland, in their larger format.) December 1999.

Keyes, J. Gregory. **Final Reckoning: The Fate of Bester.** "Babylon 5." Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-2114-0, 257pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1999; based on an outline by J. Michael Straczynski, it's the conclusion of the "Psi-Corps" sub-trilogy.) 12th November 1999.

Kihn, Greg. **Mojo Hand.** Tor/Forge, ISBN 0-312-87246-1, 256pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Horror/crime novel, first edition; the author is a former rock musician, and this is his fourth novel [we didn't see the earlier ones]; set in the 1970s, it features bluesman Robert Johnson as a character – it seems he was "a victim of a New Orleans witch's zombie poison" back in the 1930s...) 4th November 1999.

Lindley, Jonathan D. **Haven.** Citron Press [Suite 155, Business Design Centre, 52 Upper Street, London N1 0QH], ISBN 0-7544-0109-X, 231pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Sf novel, first edition; a debut book by a British writer [born 1953] who has a scientific background; this is another product of the Citron Press self-publishing "New Authors Co-Operative.") October 1999.

McConnell, Ashley. **Stargate SG-1.** Channel 4 Books, ISBN 0-7522-1869-7, 202pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV-series novelization, first published in the USA, 1998; based on a screenplay [presumably for the TV pilot episode] by Jonathan Glassner and Brad Wright, which was developed from the cinematic feature film and characters originally created by Dean Devlin and Roland Emmerich.) Late entry: September publication, received in October 1999.

McKenna, Juliet E. **The Swordsman's Oath: The Second Tale of Einarinn.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-740-4, 566pp, A-format paperback,

cover by Geoff Taylor, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 11th November 1999.

MacLeod, Ken. **The Stone Canal.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87053-1, 304pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1996; proof copy received; winner of the [American] Prometheus Award for "Best Libertarian Fiction" – despite which, this is the first U.S. edition; reviewed by Gwyneth Jones in *Interzone* 116.) January 2000.

Mezrich, Ben. **Skin.** "The X-Files." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648254-6, 261pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf/horror TV series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1999; based on the series created by Chris Carter.) 1st November 1999.

Naylor, Doug. **Red Dwarf VIII.** Virgin, ISBN 1-85227-872-2, 192pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Humorous sf TV-series scripts, first edition; a very large-format and copiously illustrated volume, marking "BBC 2's longest-running and highest-rated sitcom"; it states rather misleadingly on the title page, "Foreword & episode introductions by Doug Naylor," but most of the half-hour scripts included here are by him too, several of them written in collaboration with one Paul Alexander [who doesn't get a credit on title page or cover].) 4th November 1999.

Nicholls, Stan. **Bodyguard of Lightning: Orcs, First Blood.** "Book 1." Millennium, 1-85798-558-3, 298pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1999; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 144.) 28th October 1999.

Nicholls, Stan. **Legion of Thunder: Orcs, First Blood, Book 2.** Gollancz, 0-575-06871-X, 281pp, C-format paperback, cover by Fangorn, £9.99. (Fantasy novel,

first edition; already a top-ten bestseller in the Andromeda Bookshop, Birmingham, according to the *Guardian* newspaper in early November!) 28th October 1999.

Nylund, Eric S. **A Signal Shattered.** Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-97514-9, 378pp, hardcover, cover by Amy Halperin, \$23. (Sf novel, first edition; sequel to *Signal to Noise* [1998].) Late entry: 7th September publication, received in October 1999.

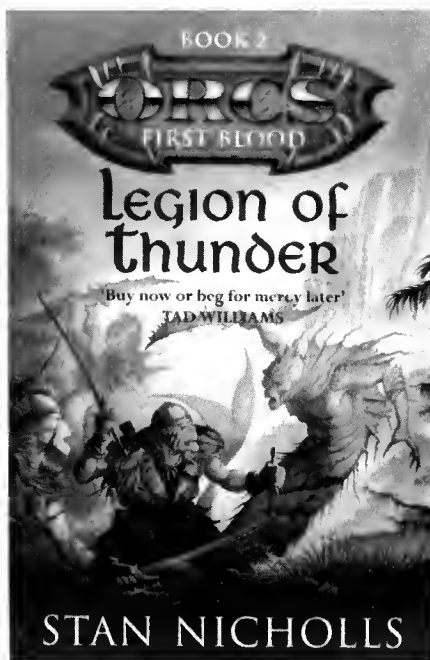
Rankin, Robert. **Snuff Fiction.** Corgi, ISBN 0-552-14590-4, 361pp, A-format paperback, cover by John Alexander, £5.99. (Humorous sf/fantasy novel, first published in 1999; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 149.) 9th December 1999.

Russell, Jay. **Waltzes and Whispers.** Introduction by Michael Marshall Smith. Afterword by Kim Newman. Pumpkin Books [PO Box 297, Nottingham NG2 4GW], ISBN 1-901914-16-X, xii+305pp, hardcover, cover by John Coulthart, £16.99. (Horror collection, first edition; it contains 15 stories, about half of which first appeared in original anthologies such as Stephen Jones and David Sutton's *Dark Terrors* series; "Jay Russell" is the form of his name used by British-resident American writer Russell Schecter [born 1961].) October 1999.

Ryman, Geoff. **Unconquered Countries: Four Novellas.** Introduction by Samuel R. Delany. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648347-X, xii+275pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1994; this is the first UK edition, more than five years after the American edition; it consists of three stories first published by *Interzone* – "The Unconquered Country" [1984], "O Happy Day" [1985] and "Fan" [1994] – and a previously unpublished novella called "A Fall of Angels"; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 85.) 1st November 1999.

Saberhagen, Fred. **The Arrival.** "Gene Roddenberry's *Earth: Final Conflict*." Tor, no ISBN shown, 315pp, hardcover, no price shown. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first edition; proof copy received; the new TV series in question is based on unproduced scripts written by Roddenberry in the 1970s and now "developed" by his widow, Majel Barrett Roddenberry; the accompanying publicity letter from editor James Frenkel states interestingly: "Like the other books we have commissioned in our series, this novel deals with matters directly related to the television series, but which are never shown in any televised episode... The point is that Fred Saberhagen was not bound by terribly tight strictures. He created a scenario that made sense to him, and ran with it. The people at the show have told us to have fun with these books...") October 1999.

Saberhagen, Fred. **The Arrival.** "Gene Roddenberry's *Earth: Final Conflict*." Ebury *interzone*



Press, ISBN 0-09-187262-6, 255pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1999.) 4th November 1999.

Sarrantonio, Al, ed. **999: New Stories of Horror and Suspense**. Avon, ISBN 0-380-97740-0, xviii+666pp, hardcover, cover by Amy Halperin, \$27.50. (Horror anthology, first edition; a whopping Millennial volume [with a neat page count!] of all-new stories by William Peter Blatty, Edward Bryant, P. D. Cacek, Ramsey Campbell, Nancy A. Collins, Thomas M. Disch, Neil Gaiman, Ed Gorman, Rick Hautala, Stephen King, T. E. D. Klein, Joe R. Lansdale, Thomas Ligotti, Bentley Little, Thomas F. Monteleone, David Morrell, Kim Newman, Joyce Carol Oates, Michael Marshall Smith, Tim Powers, Eric Van Lustbader, F. Paul Wilson, Gene Wolfe and others; as a line-up of the contemporary horror/dark fantasy field, it looks hard to beat.) *Lote entry: 9th September publication, received in October 1999.*

Sawyer, Robert J. **Golden Fleece**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86865-0, 252pp, trade paperback, cover by Bob Eggleton, \$13.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA [?], 1990; a spaceship mystery which was Canadian writer Sawyer's debut novel, here reissued in revised form.) 5th November 1999.

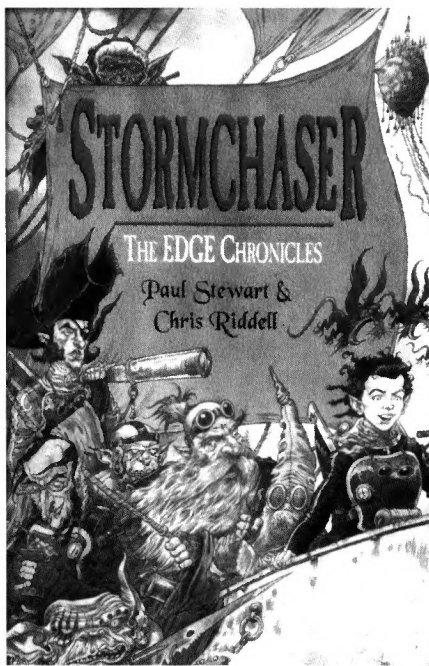
Schweighofer, Peter, and Craig Carey, eds. **Tales from the New Republic**. "Star Wars." Bantam, ISBN 0-553-S0598-X, ix+401pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf movie-series spinoff anthology, first published in the USA, 1999; contributors include Jean Rabe, Michael A. Stackpole, Timothy Zahn and several lesser-knowns recruited from the pages of *The Official Star Wars Adventure Journal* [published by West End Games, but now apparently defunct; why? we wonder – did George Lucas pull the plug, or is there simply not a sufficient market for spinoff fiction in magazine form?], of which Schweighofer and Carey are past-editors.) 9th December 1999.

Scott, Melissa. **The Shapes of Their Hearts**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-87247-X, 301pp, trade paperback, \$14.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1998; reviewed by Paul J. McAuley in *Interzone* 138.) 3rd November 1999.

Silverberg, Robert, ed. **Legends**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648394-1, xiv+352pp, A-format paperback, cover by Josh Kirby, £5.99. (Fantasy anthology, first published in the USA, 1998; this is just half of the original hardcover anthology – presumably the other half will be published soon as *Legends, Part Two*; it contains all-original stories, each set in its creator's best-known world, by Robert Jordan, Anne McCaffrey, George R. R. Martin, Terry Pratchett and Tad Williams; reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 139.) 1st November 1999.

Stewart, Paul, and Chris Riddell. **Storm-chaser: Book 2 of The Edge Chronicles**. Doubleday, ISBN 0-385-60004-6, 394pp, hardcover, cover by Riddell, £10.99. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first edition; follow-up to *Beyond the Deepwoods*, which was reviewed favourably by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 139; Stewart is an established writer of kids' books, and Riddell is an accomplished illustrator and cartoonist; the novel is attractively illustrated throughout with line-drawings by the latter.) November 1999.

Thorne, Tony. **Children of the Night: Of Vampires and Vampirism**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06646-6, viii+296pp, hardcover, £18.99. (Study of the vampire motif as expressed in legend and fiction and "lifestyle," first edition; illustrated with eight pages of photographs; this seems to be an intelligent, wide-ranging work, written in popular style; it's not error-free, though: the first page of the introduction quotes James Joyce's [or rather, his character Stephen Dedalus's] description of the sea – "snot-green and scrotum-tightening" – and attributes it to W. B. Yeats [!]; there's a reference on the first page of the main text to "the eleventh-century ecclesiast Walter Map" [should be 12th century]; there's a reference on page 12 to "the witch-craze" which "dominated the imaginative and religious landscape of the British Isles from around 1300" – not so: it didn't flare up until about two centuries later than that – a major point about the witch-craze, insufficiently appreciated, is that it was a Renaissance thing, dark undertow of an age of "enlightenment," and witches were small beer in the Middle Ages proper; apologies for the nitpicks, but details matter; the British academic author has previously written a book on a related theme, *Countess*



*Droculo: The Life and Times of Elisabeth Bothory, the Blood Countess* [not seen by us.] 29th October 1999.

Tolkien, J. R. R. **Letters from Father Christmas**. Revised edition. Edited by Bailie Tolkien. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-261-10385-7, 157pp, large-format hardcover, cover by the author, £14.99. (Illustrated juvenile fantasy book [originally created as a series of letters for the author's children], first published in 1976; this new edition adds some previously-unpublished letters and pictures.) 1st November 1999.

Tolkien, J. R. R. **The Silmarillion**. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-261-10244-3, xxiv+365pp, B-format paperback, cover by the author, £7.99. (Fantasy collection [usually regarded as a "novel"], first published in 1977; a kind of prequel to *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*; this new edition has some minor textual revisions and contains a 14-page letter by Tolkien, dated 1951, in which he gives an exposition of the background of his Middle-earth and its mythology.) 1st November 1999.

Turtledove, Harry. **Colonization: Down to Earth**. "The thrilling continuation of the *Worldwar* epic." Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-43020-4, 489pp, hardcover, \$26. (Alternate-history sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; Lord, here he goes again – another small-print, 500-page opus appearing only a few months after his last; how do even Turtledove's most ardent fans keep track?) February 2000.

Vallejo, Doris. **Ladies: Retold Tales of Goddesses and Heroines**. Illustrated by Boris Vallejo. Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85585-736-7, 186pp, large-format paperback, £14.99. (Collection of retold mythological tales, copiously illustrated by the author's former husband, the leading "muscle-artist" Boris Vallejo; first published in the USA, 1992 [although it states "copyright 1999" in this edition].) 11th November 1999.

Vance, Jack. **Emphyrio**. "SF Masterworks, 19." Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-885-X, 208pp, B-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1969.) 28th October 1999.

White, Tony. **CHARLIEUNCLENOFOLKTANGO**. Codex [PO Box 148, Hove, E. Sussex BN3 3DQ], ISBN 1-899598-13-8, 158pp, B-format paperback, £7.95. ("Stream-of-sentence alien-abduction cop novel," first edition; another piece of uncompromising Street Lit from Codex, written by the editor of the recent anthology *Britpulpl!*, whose other novels, *Road Rage!* [1997] and *Satan! Soton! Sotan!* [1999], could be described as horror; according to the blurb, this one has sf elements; if you don't know what its title means – please, don't ask.) 6th December 1999.



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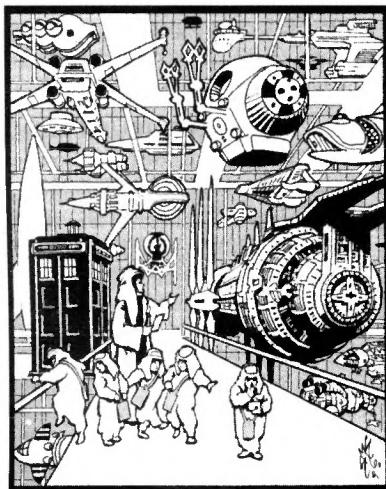
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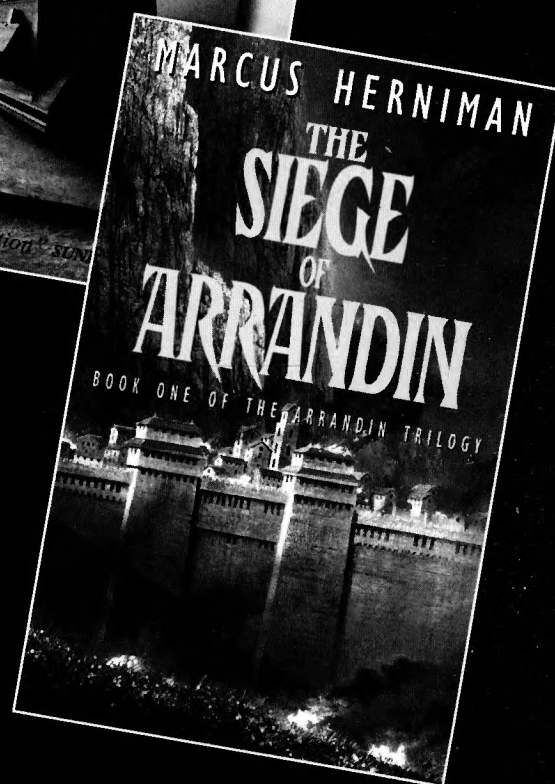
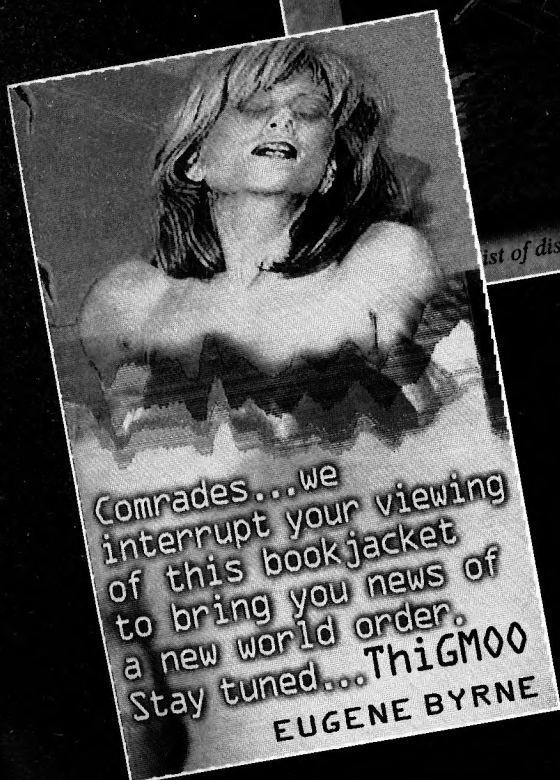
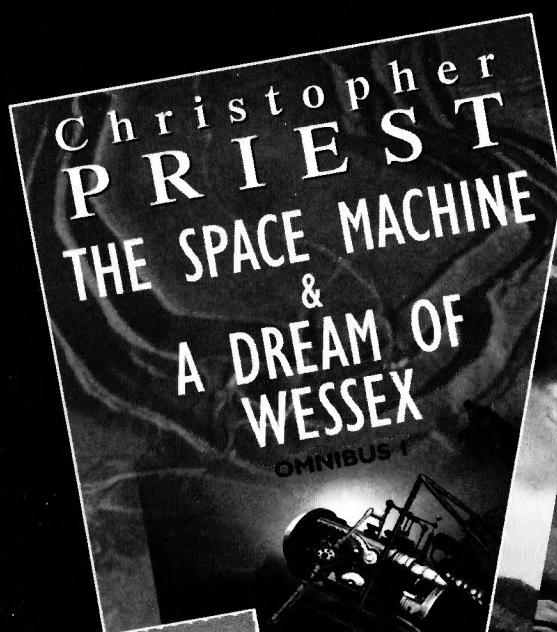
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